

**WOMEN ON THE MARGINS
AN ALTERNATIVE TO KODRAT?**

by

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**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

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October 2007

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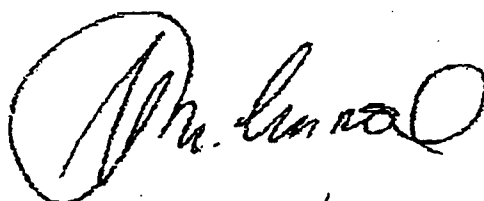
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Date:

23 November, 2007
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ABSTRACT: WOMEN ON THE MARGINS

During New Order Indonesia (1966 – 1998) women's roles were officially defined by the *Panca Darma Wanita* (The Five Duties of Women). Based on traditional notions of womanhood, these duties were used by the Indonesian State to restrict women's activities to the private sphere, that is, the family and domesticity. Linked with the Five Duties was *kodrat wanita* (women's destiny), an unofficial code of conduct, loosely based on biological determinism. *Kodrat wanita* became a benchmark by which women were measured during this period, and to a large extent this code is still valid today. In this thesis, I have analyzed female characters in Indonesian literature with specific identities that are on the periphery of this dominant discourse.

The thesis comprises an introduction, six chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography. I preface each chapter with a brief historical and theoretical context.

The first chapter (1) analyzes a mythological figure, the sorceress Calon Arang and her metamorphosis in literature over the last 50 years. Further chapters are devoted to (2) *Selir* (minor wives of Javanese aristocracy) and *Nyai* (indigenous concubines during the Dutch colonial period); (3) Ritual dancers (*ronggeng* or *tayub*); (4) Prostitutes; and (5) Lesbians. The implications of silence, madness and death for female characters are discussed in the final chapter of the thesis (6).

In each chapter, I undertake a feminist reading of specific literary texts that feature the women I have categorized; discussing the markers of their marginality such as origins, rites of passage, dress and occupation of physical and social space, their agency and/or resistance to dominant patriarchal agendas, and the outcomes of their positions on the margins of society.

In terms of chronological parameters, I have looked at images of indigenous women in selected works of Dutch colonial literature (1892 – 1954), and in Indonesian literature from 1896 – 1998. Finally, I have drawn on recent works by post-New Order young writers (1998 – 2005) that transgress the boundaries of propriety implied by the *kodrat wanita* code.

As Catherine Belsey argues in her analyses of Sherlock Holmes stories by Conan Doyle, even the most shadowy and peripheral of feminine presences may succeed in disrupting

the most logical of male narratives based on reason and scientific transparency.¹ It is these female presences, specifically those on the periphery of *kodrat wanita*, which I seek to identify and bring to the centre of attention and analysis.

¹ Belsey, C. 1985 "Constructing the subject, deconstructing the text", in: Warhol. & Price Herndl 1997, *Feminisms: an Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*: 657-673. Macmillan, Hampshire

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My interest in literature about Indonesia and by Indonesians began in 1989, when I began to visit Indonesia regularly. At first, I read anything that was available in English, which included works of literature by Indonesian and Dutch writers in translation. From 1997, as I completed a Graduate Diploma of Asian Languages, I began to read Indonesian literary works in the original. My interests in images of Indonesian women began with these readings, initially inspired by a study of Y. B. Mangunwijaya's *Burung-burung Manyar* (The Weaverbirds), and followed by my Honours thesis on Ayu Utami's *Saman*. From there, it seemed a logical step to continue my investigations of women's images by choosing it as the theme for my PhD, commenced at the University of Tasmania in 2002. An Australian Postgraduate Scholarship awarded by the University of Tasmania enabled me to carry out my research and writing full-time for three years.

I must thank, initially, Pam Allen and Richard Curtis for supporting my proposal to embark on a PhD in 2002. I also express my thanks to my co-supervisor Dr. Barbara Hatley, who, although based in Launceston, has always provided encouraging input and demonstrated an interest in my progress. Hisako Umeoka and Amanda Pink have provided willing and expert administrative help on many occasions.

My greatest debt of gratitude is to my principal supervisor Dr. Pam Allen, without whom this thesis might never have reached completion. Not only does she share my passion for Indonesian literature and women's narratives; she also generously shared with me the contents of her private library, both literary and theoretical material. While insisting on high standards of scholarship, she has always been encouraging and positive, even when it seemed that I would never find my own path through the forest of academic writing and ideas on various aspects of my topic.

I also wish to thank my friends in Indonesia, especially Dorothea Rosa Herliany (Magelang), who, in both her life and writing, is a shining example to feminists from anywhere in the world. Rosa has located and sent me some of the more obscure and out-of-print texts discussed in this thesis, and has helped me to maintain my sense of perspective (as well as my sense of humour).

My great thanks also to BJD Gayatri, (Jakarta) with whom I had long and illuminating discussions by email in March 2006. Gayatri's pioneering activities as a writer and

activist in the Indonesian women's and lesbian movements, and the detailed background information she made available, transformed and focussed the chapter on lesbians. I also thank Primanto Nugroho, for discussions about *taledhek*, *tayuban* and Mas Marco.

Finally I want to thank my children, Virginia (Melbourne) and Azhari (Banda Aceh). They have supported me in different ways, most of all with their unconditional love, and their naïve and unwavering confidence that I would find the strength to finish this study.

Heather Curnow

Yogyakarta, October 2007

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WOMEN ON THE MARGINS: INTRODUCTION

SETTING THE SCENE

'From a phallogocentric point of view, women will then come to represent the necessary frontier between men and chaos; but because of their very marginality they will also always seem to recede into and merge with the chaos of the outside. Women seen as the limit of the symbolic order will in other words share in the disconcerting properties of *all* frontiers: they will be neither inside nor outside, neither known nor unknown.' (Toil Moi 1985: 167)

As the title of this thesis suggests, I seek to reveal the existence of an alternative discourse to the mainstream gender ideal of *kodrat wanita* by analysing images of women on the margins in Indonesian and colonial Indies literature,¹ from the late nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century.

Margins suggest a **periphery**, and a periphery is associated with a centre. The centre, in the case of Indonesia and its literature, is the dominant discourse of Panca Dharma Wanita in New Order Indonesia (post 1965) as an officially prescribed set of obligations for women. However, the subtext of *kodrat wanita*, an implied code of conduct that has reinforced the ideal image for women as powerless, apolitical and chaste, as well as legitimising a double standard of sexual behaviour, commenced long before the New Order.

In the absence of an explicit definition of *kodrat wanita*, I would suggest that the Indonesian paradigm appears to be loosely based on biological determinism, with additional layers derived from Hindu, Islamic and aristocratic Javanese and regional *adat*,² reinforced by role models from traditional literature such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

The *kodrat* of Indonesian women prescribes that they should be meek, passive, obedient to the male members of the family, sexually shy and modest, self-sacrificing and nurturing, and that they should find their main vocation in marriage and motherhood. (Wieringa 1998: 148)

¹ By "literature" I mean literary works such as novels and short stories, rather than "literature" in the generic sense.

² *Adat*: customary law

Who are the women on the margins, who will substantiate the alternative discourse in literature that I have set out to establish? I have chosen several categories of women, and sought their presence and significance throughout the narratives of Indonesian literature. They are distinguished from *kodrat wanita* by being one or a combination of the following: unmarried / not exclusively attached to a particular man, politically active, neither invariably chaste, monogamous nor heterosexual, and often exercising powers usually reserved for men – political emancipation, spiritual / magical authority, sexual autonomy, spatial mobility and a degree of agency to change the situations in which they find themselves.

These are women with specific **identities** (either chosen or forced upon them) that place them on the periphery of mainstream sexual discourse and outside the confines of *kodrat wanita*. The first chapter discusses Calon Arang, the widow-witch, who represents political resistance against the patriarchy as well as mirroring male anxieties about uncontrolled female sexuality. Chapter 2 analyses and compares *selir* (minor / secondary consorts of the Javanese aristocracy) and *nyai* (housekeeper-concubines during the colonial period). Further chapters discuss the changing perceptions of *ronggeng* or *taledhek*, ritual dancers who were originally sacral figures, central to the prosperity of their towns and villages, and prostitutes, who signalled the introduction of a monetary exchange for sexual services. Lesbians do not fulfil any of the requirements prescribed by Dharma Wanita except that of Indonesian citizenship, from which they have been excluded by the discriminatory speeches of some of Indonesia's leading politicians. Literary works dealing with deviant **behaviours** such as sadomasochism, incest, transsexuality or transvestitism will not be analysed (unless they occur within the framework of a woman-centred relationship).

Women on the margins have a long history, subject to ebbs and flows from the centre, depending on the attitudes, ideologies and moralities of the dominant patriarchal regime, whether indigenous, Dutch colonial or the Indonesian State. In this introduction, I begin by taking a broad historical overview of women and shifts in gender attitudes, derived from earlier narratives going back to the fourteenth century, up till the end of the New Order (1998) and the subsequent period from 1998 - 2005 (referred to by scholars as either "Reformasi" or "post-New Order").

Women and Power: Pre-Colonial and Colonial Images

Female mythological, quasi-historical and historical figures present a more complex and open-ended image of female power than does the state-formulated Panca Dharma Wanita enshrined during the New Order.

Some powerful pre-colonial and colonial women's images that will be briefly considered here are the quasi-legendary queen Ken Dedes, and historical female figures (such as Sekar Kedaton) from the highly structured societies of the royal courts of Java, who managed to resist conventional expectations of their roles. While it is clear that female power in the form of symbolic unions with Javanese royalty³ and propitiation rites to goddesses such as Durga still play an important part in Javanese ritual life (Carey & Houben 1992), it would be a mistake to equate this with female public status in the mundane world. Rosaldo & Lamphere (1974: 3) emphasise the existence of 'historically documented and well-studied contemporary societies that manifest female fertility cults while placing political power in the hands of men'. They also remind us that 'myths of primordial female eminence are found today in male-dominated societies, and most anthropologists believe that such myths, rather than reflecting history, are expressions of a culture's dreams or fantasies or validations of political alignments in the societies in which they are told.' With reference to Indonesia, Carey and Houben (1992: 17) draw attention to 'the link between the establishment and legitimation of royal authority and women of superabundant power' in Java.

I also touch on historical shifts in the status of women: in terms of prescriptions about cultural space, especially public space. These changes were based on binary and gender-specific divisions, and then on religious prohibitions that linked the idea of female seclusion with chastity and/or high status. The most important agents of change were the growing influence of Islam and the establishment of 'states' in Southeast Asia from the late thirteenth century, resulting in the diminished role of women, especially elite women, in public life and leadership. (Andaya 1998: 2000)

Sexuality, Space, and Status

It is clear from descriptions of legendary and quasi-historical figures such as Nyai Loro Kidul, Ken Dedes and Calon Arang / Bathari Durga, that their sacral power was

³ Most Central Javanese rulers had only three principal wives, the fourth position being reserved for their symbolic union with Nyai Loro Kidul, the Queen of the South Seas, also thought to be an avatar of Durga. See Carey & Houben 1992: 35 – 39, n.21.

directly connected with their sexuality, symbolised by flames issuing from their genitals. This power could be used in either a positive or negative way, to bring about great prosperity or pestilence and misfortune, so it was in the best interests of Southeast Asian rulers to form alliances with these powerful women in order to channel their powers into safe and productive outcomes.

Two royal women who possessed this power were Ken Dedes, of the East Javanese kingdom of Tumapel-Singasari in the thirteenth century, and a princess from the kingdom of Pajajaran from West Java. 'Both these women were so "hot" in the magical sense, that flames issued forth from their wombs, and only men of unusual potency were able to possess them' (Carey & Houben 1992: 15).

The Javanese chronicle from this period, the *Pararaton*⁴ related that Ken Dedes had a 'glowing vulva', 'the sign of an imperial woman... Whoever married her... would become sovereign of the world...' This is a particularly graphic representation of the belief in the power of spiritually powerful women to confer political hegemony (Kumar 2000: 96). Ken Dedes began her historical existence as the consort of Tunggal Ametung, ruler of Tumapel-Singosari, a moderately prosperous kingdom in East Java. Legend has it that Ken Arok, one of the King's palace guards, became aware of her powers when he glimpsed a green glow from her thighs when she was alighting from her chariot. He subsequently murdered the King, and by marrying Ken Dedes, succeeded to the Singasari throne, in spite of his humble origins.

The (un-named) princess of Pajajaran, according to Javanese chronicles, was the mother of the Dutch Governor-General Jan Pieterszoon Coen (in office 1618-1623 / 1627-1629). According to Reid (2000: 177) this extraordinary legend appears in a number of Javanese texts to 'legitimate Dutch power in Batavia as a successor to the Sundanese Kingdom of Pajajaran in West Java'. The common element in all the stories was that of the princess's flaming genitals, which made it impossible for ordinary men to have intercourse with her. Eventually she was sold to the Dutch for the bride price of three cannons, and married to the mythical Baron Sukmul, Coen's father. (Carey & Houben 1992: 15; Reid 2000: 177)

During the sixteenth century, temporary marriage with visiting foreigners was a customary feature of Southeast Asian life, and the exchange of gifts in return for

⁴ The *Pararaton* chronicle covers the period of the Singosari and Majapahit Kingdoms, from mythical origins until 1389 AD.

hospitality established an interdependent network of kin that was advantageous to both parties in terms of economics and prestige, especially as it was women who controlled the retail trade. These unions, which could involve wives and daughters of elite indigenous families, were imbued with the same mutual fidelity and respect as a more permanent marriage.

Andaya (1998) examines changing attitudes to sexuality in the early modern period (1500 – 1800)⁵ in Southeast Asia. She concludes that the rise of patriarchal states and penetration of elite values (with an emphasis on the importance of pre-marital virginity for women) together with the system of gifts being replaced with a monetised system of exchange eroded the respectability of the temporary wife. By the early eighteenth century, the expansion of urban centres and the increase in the number of foreign males (both European and Chinese) also contributed to the commercialisation of sex.

In another essay, Andaya examines the strategies by which Islamic states in island Southeast Asia introduced new ways of ordering gender relations, and argues that 'ideas of female seclusion so often associated with Islam in fact tapped deep cultural veins which had long drawn connections between "innerness" and being female" (2000b: 233).

In pre-Islamic Southeast Asia, the division of space according to gender was associated with the sacral danger attached to women's sexuality, particularly menstruation and birth. This may have given rise to the binaries of female/inside/below and male/outside/above. These dichotomies were also reflected in domestic architecture, with arrangements such as segregated sleeping quarters, and areas set aside below and near the house for female activities such as weaving, spinning and rice pounding, activities associated with the home and the domestic sphere. Significantly, however, 'the "feminising" of "inside/below" that was so prevalent in early Southeast Asia did not carry with it the connotations of inferiority to the masculinized "outside/above", for indigenous gender differentiation was dialectical, interdependent and relatively egalitarian rather than hierarchical.' (Andaya 2000b: 235)

⁵ Early modern: a historical term coined by Anthony Reid. It refers to the period from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. See "Introduction: A time and a place" in Reid 1993, *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power and Belief*.

By contrast, male power was manifested by conquest and victory in both warfare and sex, and male virility demonstrated by the ownership of large numbers of women. 'Harem' women were mentioned from the seventh century as part of the male ruler's retinue. According to Andaya, (2000b: 240) 'The competition between men for access to women is a primary theme in indigenous sources, and the image of the female *who becomes an object of desire once she is visible outside her home* ⁶ is reiterated in both oral and written material'.

Western scholars' assumptions of the high status of women (first suggested by George Coedès in 1944 and re-stated in 1988 by Anthony Reid in *The Lands below the Winds*) were largely based on women's perceived prominence in the control of domestic finances and petty trading economies.

By the end of the sixteenth century, as seclusion became increasingly linked with status under Islam, highborn women withdrew from the marketplace. 'As the presence of foreign traders increased and as the commoditization of sex in trading areas became more pronounced the market became increasingly seen as a place of sexual risk.' (Andaya 2000: 246)

The arrangement of the market at Banten reflected these changes: a special area was set aside for the trading activities of married women, and there was an area 'where traders and adventurers strolled', which would have provided a meeting ground for sexual transactions (Andaya 1998: f/n 32). Historically, women's activities in the household and marketplace have never been accorded a high level of respect on the scale of spiritual power (considered to be acquired by men through ascetic practice, self-control in speech and actions, travel and the avoidance of the mundane world of trade).

As well as the gradual exclusion of women from the public sphere (including the market and the mosque) codes of dress became more restrictive. The state of Macassar in the southern Celebes (Sulawesi) illustrated a rapid transition from relative freedom in women's dress to relative invisibility in the space of forty years. In 1607 a Dutch description of Macassar (just two years after the acceptance of Islam) noted that:

⁶ Italics are the present writer's.

While they were heathen the women cut off their hair with a comb, but they now have it washed long, and bind it in the manner of the Malay women; the female slaves whom one sees carrying water in the back streets have their upper body with the breasts completely naked, and wear trousers which come up to the navel. (Cited in Reid 2000: 25)

Forty years later another visitor reported female veiling in Macassar: 'The women are entirely covered from head to foot, in such a fashion that not even their faces can be seen.' (Reid 2000: 25)

Religion, Ascetics, Scholars and Seclusion

Hinduism and Islam, according to Ann Kumar (2000: 97) introduced "draconian" concepts of the manner in which wives could demonstrate their virtue, ranging from suttee to other types of ordeal. Both Islam and Hinduism rated women as inferior to men, and Indic texts explicitly described women as unfaithful by nature. The most extreme illustration of mistrust of women in traditional Indic literature is the trial by fire of Rama's wife, Sita.

One means by which women could acquire prestige was through scholarship – especially religious knowledge. Ann Kumar (2000: 98) gives as an example Tambang Raras in the *Centhini*, whose religious development was the cornerstone of her relationship with her husband Among Ronga. As husband and mentor, he fulfilled his wife's desire for knowledge even at the expense of the consummation of their marriage. Tambang Raras also had the attribute of *cahya* (radiance), which is associated with semi-divine and royal persons. Kumar's opinion is that this alternative female role introduced by Islam 'runs counter to the ostensible misogyny' of other texts, with their extreme requirements for females to prove their fidelity.

Another positive counter-image in both pre-Islamic and Islamic texts is the female ascetic, the 'tradition of solitary women with spiritual status' (Kumar 2000: 101). There are several historical examples from the court of Surakarta of women who devoted their lives to religious studies, the most extraordinary being a Surakarta princess, Sekar Kedaton (Flower of the Palace). The Surakarta court of Pakubuwana XI (whose first queen is reputed to have killed herself by swallowing diamonds in protest over the ascendancy of a rival) was the setting for what Nancy Florida (1996: 215) describes as 'the great royal romantic failure of nineteenth century Central Java'.

Pakubuwana courted his cousin Sekar Kedaton for nearly twenty years, without success.

The princess reserved herself to maidenhood and ascended to a legendary status of unrivalled spiritual prowess. Refusing to become a wife, even of a king, Sekar Kadhaton resisted the dominant male ideology and avoided a dismal female reality. She rejected both the female reality of polygyny's intrigues and the male fantasy of virtuous wifehood. Instead, she became a noted intellectual, writer, and mystical traveller. (Florida 1996: 215 – 216)

Kumar (2000: 104) concludes her discussion of early images of Javanese women by proposing an oppositional view: between an 'ideology of respect' embodied by indigenous Javanese myths, with regard to the divine blessings conferred by women, and 'ideologies of suspicion' inherent in Hindu and Islamic religions, suggesting the inferiority and treachery of women, who were obliged to undergo ordeals or violence in order to prove their obedience and virtue.

Until the fourteenth century, it is evident that women possessed of magical potency and / or with semi-divine status were respected and sought after as consorts, especially by Java's ruling dynasties. However, with the spread of Islam in the Southeast Asian island states (from the late thirteenth century), women were gradually invested with a contradictory image; that of fragile beings needing male patronage and protection. As Andaya (2000: 240) sums up: 'The notion of female vulnerability to supernatural as well as human forces was a powerful agent in promoting the idea that women should not move far away from their home so that they could remain under the protection of their male kin'. Even in predominantly Hindu Bali, the notion of female seclusion (linked to the preservation of purity) was closely related to class and status.

From Kartini to Gerwani

Tensions between *adat* (indigenous customs) and Islamic practice no doubt influenced shifts in gender attitudes during the early modern and colonial periods in the Indies. However, in the twentieth century, as Daniel Lev (1996: 194) has pointed out, 'The women's movement did not emerge from either Islam or local cultures, but from a progressive nationalism that incorporated but also contended with both, and much else besides, including Dutch education and intellectual influence.' Lev (1996:

197) argues that in the Parliamentary and Guided Democracy periods of Indonesia's history, there was no attempt to distinguish ideologically between men and women.

In the first half of the twentieth century, there had been a proliferation of women's organizations: at the first Indonesian women's congress in December 1928 no less than 30 organizations were represented. The *Isteri Sedar*, for example, campaigned for women's emancipation and against abusive *adat* and religious practices. Women were also active in the nationalist movement leading up to Indonesian independence. However, with the fall of Sukarno's regime in 1965, radical changes took place. All women's organizations, with the exception of those sanctioned by the New Order State and under the umbrella of Dharma Wanita, were suppressed.

The Suharto regime's need for control, which may have stemmed from what Lev describes as a 'military ethos', led to a suspicion of all popular movements (including women's movements) as sources of instability. As Lev (1996: 198) sums up: 'What could be more uncomfortable, even destabilizing, than women re-defining themselves as something other than the wives and mothers they had always been?'

During New Order Indonesia (1966 – 1998), women's roles were officially defined by the Panca Dharma Wanita (Five Duties of Women), based on "traditional" notions of womanhood. These duties became a strategy used by the Indonesian State to limit women's activities to the private sphere and domesticity. Associated with this was the *unofficial* code of *kodrat wanita*,⁷ a tacit subtext of acceptable behaviour by which women (and their reflections in literature) were measured during this period, and which is, to a large extent, still valid today.

The Five Duties of Women were defined as follows: women as loyal companions to the husband; women as procreators for the nation; women as educators and guides for children; women as 'regulators' of the household; and finally, women as useful members of society. (Suryakusuma 2004: 428)

During the New Order, traditional notions of womanhood were appropriated to fit in with the power interests of the state. In the construction of womanhood during the New Order, women were defined officially, in the *Panca Dharma Wanita*, as the "accompaniment" of men, as bearers of descendants and teachers of children, as managers of the home, as wage earners and finally as members of society. Panca

⁷ Woman's destiny, woman's inherent nature.

Dharma Wanita is the equivalent of the *Pancasila* state ideology for women, principles which women have to loyally and unquestioningly abide to. Panca Dharma Wanita was manifested through the creation of *Dharma Wanita* (the civil service wives' association), which espoused the above ideals for women as an ideology that I have labeled "State Ibuism" (Suryakusuma 2004: 132) ⁸

If women's *duties* as defined in Panca Dharma Wanita are very specific, the *code* of behaviour is more difficult to pin down.⁹ Saskia Wieringa (1998: 169, n.17) states that there have been few analyses of *kodrat*, mentioning, as does Sylvia Tiwon (1996: 51) the letters of Kartini as one of the best sources about *kodrat*: for an aristocratic Javanese woman it involved seclusion from the age of puberty until marriage, when the choice of a suitable husband was determined by her parents; a claustrophobic world literally circumscribed by high walls and closed doors.

My prison is a large house, encircled by spacious grounds. But it is encircled by a high stone wall and this kept me imprisoned. No matter how large the house and garden, if you are forced to live there you feel stifled. I remember how, in silent desperation, I flung myself at the eternally closed door and against the cold stone walls. No matter in which direction I walked, I would run into a stone wall or a locked door. (R. A. Kartini, from *Door Duisternis Tot Licht*, English translation by Tiwon 1996: 51)

If Dharma Wanita's agenda was to administer the gender ideologies and values of the Indonesian state at the basic social level of the nuclear family, assisted by the state-sponsored family welfare organization PKK,¹⁰ *kodrat wanita* reinforced patriarchal attitudes in a more insidious manner. Suryakusuma (2004: 127-158), in an analysis of the attitudes of the major parties in the 1999 national elections, notes that *kodrat* was often invoked to sideline women's issues, and that when a party's platform did give attention to these issues, pronouncements were generally vague. There is also an awareness that the concept of *kodrat* can be manipulated to allocate special roles to women that are not borne by men. Aisyah Hamid, a woman legislator who recognized the tendency of Indonesia's leaders to use the concept of *kodrat* in a specific way, argued that:

⁸ Dharma Wanita (founded 1974) was the female auxiliary of the Indonesian civil service organization (Korpri). See Suryakusuma 1996: 2004.

⁹ Wieringa (1998: 147) describes *kodrat* as 'an Islam-inspired code of conduct based on woman's intrinsic "nature"'; Suryakusuma (2004: 424-425) defines it as: "Woman's destiny", a biological determinism often invoked by society and religion and appropriated by the state to relegate women to the private sphere and domesticity.'

¹⁰ PKK: Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga. See Suryakusuma 2004: 132 - 133, 429.

Sometimes we treat the words *kodrat* and obligations as the same thing, when they are two different things. *Kodrat* are those characteristics peculiar to women, like menstruation, pregnancy and breast feeding. Our society and religious experts have depicted obligation as the woman's *kodrat*. (Cited in Suryakusuma 2004: 137)

To sum up, the ideal woman of *kodrat wanita* is heterosexual, chaste, subservient and married, puts her husband, family and community concerns before her own interests, keeps a discreet profile in the world of politics, and always acts within the bounds of propriety, in matters of dress, speech and behaviour, especially in public. She is also a bastion of conservative social and moral values and is responsible for transmitting these values to other members of her family.

Until the end of the New Order the code for women was frequently reinforced in literature and other cultural genres. Hatley (2002b: 130-133) refers to literary works such as "Air Suci Sita" (Leila Chudori), and *La Barka*, (NH Dini) in which Indonesian female characters maintain a refined distance in the face of more sexually assertive 'Western' mores. Even today, many women writers and scholars continue to internalize the 'baggage' of *kodrat*, which is rendered more powerful by its ability to accommodate extra layers of meaning.

Sylvia Tiwon (1996) presents two dominant images that have come to represent positive and negative extremes of the Indonesian feminine in twentieth century Indonesia: Kartini and Gerwani.

At the 'positive' extreme is R. A. Kartini, a Javanese aristocrat, who with the support of liberal Dutch friends in Indonesia and Holland, campaigned for women's rights to education and vocational training and against forced marriages. Through the posthumous publication of her private letters to J. H. Abendanon and his wife, as well as other correspondents, Kartini's side of the correspondence has become public property. Through selection, publication, editing, translation (and mis-translation) of the letters, as well as a number of biographies and commentaries, Kartini's image (as well as her writing) has been re-articulated over nearly a century. Eventually, in New Order and Reformasi Indonesia, Kartini 'stands as the officially sanctioned model of behavior not for what she says but rather for what is said about her'. (Tiwon 1996: 57)

The 1911 edition of her selected letters in the original Dutch, read by Dutch and Indonesian intellectuals, became an advertisement for the policies of the 'Ethical'

programs of Dutch liberals, through their Director of Education in the Indies, J.H. Abendanon. In the 1960s, Pramoedya Ananta Toer's biography of Kartini, *Panggil Aku Kartini Saja* (Just call me Kartini), created a controversy. Although the general consensus was that Kartini was motivated by progressive ideas of social justice and human rights, Pramoedya's intention had been to represent Kartini as 'the embodiment of the common people by emphasising the role of her biological mother, Ngasirah, the commoner.' (Tiwon 1996: 54 – 55, n.11). The 'semi-official' biography by Tashadi published in 1985 by the Indonesian Department of Education and Culture,¹¹ as well as misinterpreting significant passages in the transition from Dutch to Indonesian, dedicates more than a chapter to the brief period of Kartini's life when she exchanged her ideal of remaining single for the role of wife and mother, thus idealizing (at the expense of Kartini as pioneering feminist) the role of 'Ibu', which later evolved to a national apotheosis of Kartini as 'Mother of the Nation'. (Tiwon 1996: 57)

The letters of Kartini and her sisters to J.H. Abendanon and his wife Rosa (Coté, 1992) reveal that Kartini was not alone, either emotionally or ideologically. Two younger sisters, who not only shared her ideals but also frequently wrote to the Abendanons as fluently as Kartini herself, shared her seclusion within the aristocratic prison of her father's house in Jepara.¹² Finally, Jean Taylor (1993) has re-positioned Kartini within the Javanese priyayi class as a successor to resistant figures such as Sekar Kedaton, rather than as an outcome of her exposure to Dutch liberal ideas and education.

As counterpoint to Kartini as the national ideal, Tiwon positions the spectre of Gerwani, the women's organisation affiliated with the Indonesian Communist Party, which was accused of being the main actor in sexual orgies involving the alleged torture, mutilation and rape of six Indonesian Generals in 1965.

These images, now highly contested, reported in the Indonesian press at the time, and reiterated not long afterwards by western scholars¹³, acted as powerful propaganda in the suppression of all women's organisations, except those that were compatible with, and under the umbrella of, the State, particularly Dharma Wanita.

¹¹ See Tiwon 1996: 53 – 57 for a deconstruction of Tashadi's biography.

¹² See also Sears 1996: 37 n.65

¹³ See Wieringa 1985, *The Perfumed Nightmare*, for a discussion of these issues. Also Anderson & McVey 1971, *A Preliminary Analysis of the October 1, 1965 Coup in Indonesia*, Ithaca, Interim Report

Such images, presenting women as sexually and politically aggressive, especially in groups, and a threat to stability, have persisted. The reverse of the coin is the meek, chaste, obedient and apolitical woman whose primary role is as wife and watchdog of the family's morality. This is what Tiwon describes as the Kartini / Gerwani complex:

The model woman is the individual, her femaleness sequestered from other females by rank, by age, by social status. Her definition as *ibu* controls her and fixes her within a hierarchical web of ties and responsibilities. The converse of this model is women in a crowd in which all rankings fall away, as do age, family ties, and social status; their femaleness thus augmented, they become channels for power. In a very real sense, then, political behavior is equated with sexual behavior: the one is presented as good and nurturing; the other is presented as a powerful but destructive and thereby evil force. (Tiwon 1996: 65)

It is my contention that both models represent a prison for the modern Indonesian woman. The choice of independent political activity invites the accusation of subversion, while a retreat to the safe space of marriage removes women from the dangerous but potentially creative margins of chaos and re-attaches them firmly to patriarchal control.

The reader of modern Indonesian literature repeatedly comes across tensions produced by both images: The first, womanly aspirations to wifedom, is often at the cost of disappointment and betrayal. The second image links the solitary or non-conventional woman and Gerwani – either in present time, or as an inherited stigma from mother or grandmother.

In Indonesian literature and performance since 1998, women writers have re-examined and celebrated elemental female power and sexuality, especially reclaiming the monstrous and predatory Other (embodied in Gerwani and the widow-witch Calon Arang) demonized by Suharto's regime as the polar opposite to the refined, chaste, obedient and apolitical paradigm of *kodrat wanita*.¹⁴ Some writers (Ayu Utami, Dewi Lestari, Dinar Rahayu, Djenar Maesa Ayu, Herlinatiens, Ratri M.) have also confronted the stigmas attached to other marginalised women, for example lesbians, prostitutes, and 'deviants' such as sadists and masochists.

¹⁴ See Aquarini Priyatna Prabasmoro's essay, "Abjek dan monstrous feminin" in *Jurnal Perempuan* 41, 2005: 37 – 47.

LITERATURE REVIEW

I need to state at the outset that works in Old Javanese or Dutch are not directly accessible to me. Therefore in my discussion of these works I have been obliged to work through mediation – that is, through the translation of literary works into English and scholarly discussion (in English or Indonesian) by other authors.

In the case of Dutch texts, my work has been facilitated by the English translations of the Library of the Indies series, edited by E M Beekman and published by the University of Massachusetts Press. The two major overviews of Indies literature in English are by Rob Nieuwenhuys (*Mirror of the Indies*, 1982) and E M Beekman (*Troubled Pleasures: Dutch Colonial Literature from the East Indies*, 1996).

From the 1980s, an increasing number of researchers and scholars have been translating and reinterpreting both early historical / literary texts (such as *kakawin*) and analysing contemporary Indonesian literature from a feminist perspective. Western scholars include Pam Allen, Harry Aveling, Katrin Bandel, Michael Bodden, Lily Clerkx, Nancy Cooper, Helen Creese, Nancy Florida, Barbara Hatley, Thomas Hunter, Tineke Hellwig, Ann Kumar, Jean Gelman Taylor, Sylvia Tiwon and Saskia Wieringa. In Indonesia, literary scholars and feminist researchers include Aquarini Priyatna Prabasmoro, Gadis Arivia, Melani Budianta, Kris Budiman, Manneke Budiman, Cahyaningrum Dewojati, Medy Loekito, Saraswati Sunindyo, Julia Suryakusuma, and Toeti Heraty. Feminist literary studies in Indonesia are still dependent on Western discourses (particularly the work of French theorists such as Cixous, Kristeva and Irigaray), and Indonesian scholars have only recently begun to apply these theories to specific works of Indonesian literature.¹⁵ In this thesis I also embed my discussions of Indonesian literature in Western literary and critical theory.

Monographs and Collections of Essays

Specific texts dealing with marginal women in Indonesia are rare. The earliest located study on prostitution is in Indonesian – a collection of essays based on field work and interviews in Jakarta, originally written as a series for the newspaper *Sinar Harapan* and published in book form the same year (Yuyu Krisna, *Menyusuri Remang-remang Jakarta*, 1979). There are two monographs on the topic in English,

¹⁵ For example, selected reviews and articles in *Jurnal Perempuan*, 2003 – 2005, and two books, *Kritik Sastra Feminis: Teori dan Aplikasinya* (Sugihastuti & Suharto, 2002) and *Kritik Sastra Feminis: Sebuah Pengantar* (Soenarjati Djajanegara, 2002).

both with a sociological bias: Alison Murray's *No Money, No Honey: A Study of Street Traders and Prostitutes in Jakarta* (1991) and Gavin Jones et al, *Prostitution in Indonesia* (1995). A recent addition to the literature on prostitution is Moammar Emka's *Jakarta Undercover: Sex 'n the City* (2003), which describes, from the male consumer's viewpoint, the adventures of Jakarta's moneyed classes in the elite sex establishments of modern Jakarta. Articles by Ivan Wolffers et al. (1999) and Rebecca Surtees (2005) give more nuanced accounts of the multiple identities and self-images of Indonesian prostitutes in the rapidly changing political and social climate of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

I found the most inspirational material on women on the margins in collections of essays on women and gender issues in a cross-cultural context, beginning with *Women, Culture and Society*, the pioneering collection of writings by anthropologists and sociologists edited by Michele Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (1974). This collection was followed by Jane Atkinson and Shelly Errington's *Power and Difference: Gender in Island Southeast Asia* (1990) and Elsbeth Locher-Scholten and Anke Niehofs' *Indonesian Women in Focus: Past and Present Notions* (which had its origins in an interdisciplinary symposium in Leiden in 1984 and was first published in English in 1992). Although dominated by anthropologists and historians, the latter volume contained two of the first considerations of women as represented in Indonesian literature, by Tineke Hellwig and Els Postel-Coster, as well as useful contributions on the image of women in the Central Javanese courts (Peter Carey and Vincent Houben) and on prostitution in the colonial Indies (Liesbeth Hesselink).

Other collections of essays that contributed greatly to my understanding of the image of Indonesian women, were Aiwa Ong and Michael Peletz, *Bewitching Women, Pious Men: Gender and Body Politics in Southeast Asia* (1995), Laurie Sears' *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia* (1996), Barbara Watson Andaya, *Other Pasts* (2000), Robinson & Bessell, *Women in Indonesia* (2002) and Julia Suryakusuma's *Sex, Power and Nation* (2004). As well as being rich lodes of discussion on women and gender, many of these collections included essays based in the Southeast Asian region in general, or Indonesia in particular, that were directly pertinent to my study. Suryakusuma's collection of essays was particularly illuminating as a gendered commentary on political developments in New Order / Reformasi Indonesia and their relevance to *kodrat wanita*, particularly the chapter "Confronting Kodrat" (127 – 158). My chapter on lesbians is grounded in the writings of Saskia Wieringa and Evelyn Blackwood, in particular their introductory and individual essays in *Female*

Desires: Same-Sex Relations and Transgender Practices Across Cultures (1999), as well as BJD Gayatri's essay "Indonesian lesbians writing their own script" from Monika Reinfelder's *Amazon to Zami* (1996).

The collections of essays cited above are woven through with a common thread. This concerns the sources of female power (in both court and proletariat circles), the strategies used by men to marginalize, or contain and channel this desirable but potentially threatening resource, and female strategies of counter-resistance to subvert patriarchal control and regain their autonomy. In particular, *Fantasizing the Feminine* contains a number of discourses on margins and centres, control and resistance, that have influenced the theoretical emphasis of this thesis, especially Sylvia Tiwon's juxtaposition of Kartini and Gerwani as oppositional images of the Indonesian feminine.

Studies of Indonesian literature

Overviews of Indonesian literature do not discuss women on the margins, especially prostitution or concubinage, as a separate topic. Teeuw's two-volume *Modern Indonesian Literature* does not dwell on the subject, and possible leads can often only be extrapolated from oblique comments. For example, Rohaya in Armijn Pane's *Belenggu* is described only as Doctor Surtono's former sweetheart, without explicit reference to her professions as either a kroncong singer or prostitute (although Teeuw alludes to her 'murky past'¹⁶). Moreover, the date of Teeuw's books (last revised in 1979) precludes discussion of Pramoedya's tetralogy and the parameters exclude Indies literature. Tineke Hellwig's *In the Shadow of Change: Images of Women in Indonesian Literature* (1994) discusses from a feminist point of view several Indonesian texts that will be included in this study, for example, Armijn Pane's *Belenggu*, Pramoedya's *Gadis Pantai* and *Bumi Manusia*; and Ahmad Tohari's *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*.

In the twenty-first century, there have been several publications concerned with the postcolonial study of Indonesian literature (Foulcher & Day, 2002; Maier, 2004; Hoadley, 2005; Danerek, 2006). In particular three essays in Foulcher & Day's *Clearing a Space* are directly relevant to this thesis: Barbara Hatley on "Postcoloniality and the feminine in modern Indonesian literature", Goenawan

¹⁶ Teeuw I, 1994: 82 comments (of Rohaya) "Her murky past definitely makes her unfit to give lasting safety to Sukartono".

Mohamad, "Forgetting, poetry and the nation", which analyses the character of Nyai Ontosoroh in Pramoedya's 'Buru Quartet', and Paul Tickell on Mas Marco Kartodikromo. In Maier's *We are Playing Relatives: A Survey of Malay Writing*, each chapter is framed by a close contextual reading of a selected work of Malay literature (including Armijn Pane's *Belenggu* and Mas Marco's *Student Hidjo*, both discussed in this thesis). Hoadley's book, *Literary Discourses in New Order Indonesia: The Aftermath of 1965 – 1966*, analyses several literary works that deal with the communist aftermath of 1965 – 1966, including Umar Kayam's *Bawuk* and Tohari's *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* trilogy.

Monographs on sociology and history

Monographs on history and sociology provide much useful discussion on women in literature not available elsewhere. Jean Gelman Taylor's *The Social World of Batavia* (1983) draws on colonial novels, many by women, as source material, as does the exhaustive sociological survey *Living in Deli* (Clerkx and Wertheim, 1991) which analyses thematically nine 'plantation' novels / collections of stories, including four by L. Szekely and Madelon Lulofs-Szekely. The latter study isolates material on the *nyai* phenomenon, which is useful in the case of novels not translated into English. It also contrasts views of the plantation culture of Deli by male and female novelists.

Ann Stoler's monograph *Capitalism and Confrontation in Sumatra's Plantation Belt* (1985) has sections on women in the labour force (including enforced prostitution), as does Jan Breman's *Taming the Coolie Beast* (1989). Stoler also draws to some extent on plantation novels, although she had initial reservations about the usefulness of literature as source material. However, by 1991 she seems to have accepted the novel as a valid reflection of reality.¹⁷ Essays by both Stoler and Breman in Breman's collection of essays *Imperial Monkey Business* (1990) were also important sources for this aspect of my thesis.

Performing Arts

In the case of the performing arts / ronggeng and similar dancers, T. S. Raffles, *The History of Java* (1817), contains an early and often quoted passage on the ronggeng, specifically linking this dance form to prostitution; while Bandem and de Boer, *Kaja and Kelod* (1981), contains relevant passages about *joged* and other dancers during the colonial period written by Dutch travellers and scholars in Bali. R. Anderson

¹⁷ See Ann Stoler's Introduction to Clerkx & Wertheim 1991, *Living in Deli*

Sutton's article "Who is the pesindhen? Notes on the female singing tradition in Java" (1987), gives a comprehensive historical survey of the singer-dancer tradition in Java and its links to institutionalised prostitution, from the fourteenth to the twentieth century. Articles by Robert Hefner (1987), and Primanto Nugroho (2001) also contributed valuable insights on *ronggeng* and the *tayuban* tradition.

Western critical theory has been an essential grounding for my analyses of various literary texts and themes. My reliance on literary theory will be most evident in the chapter on lesbians, as well as the final chapter, Silence / Madness / Death. My explorations have ranged from western literary theory and reader response theory (Catherine Belsey, Annette Kolodny, Gilbert and Gubar) to psychoanalytic / psychiatric history and theory (Phyllis Chesler, Barbara Johnson, Nina Baym, Elaine Showalter, Luce Irigaray, Shosanna Felman) to discourses on lesbian literature, female narrative space and the politics of marginalization (Bonnie Zimmerman, Martha Vicinus, Terry Castle, Marilyn Farwell, Stuart Hall).

PARAMETERS

In setting parameters for this thesis, I was faced with an initial dilemma: that of definition. What is Indonesian literature? Should I include only works written in the Indonesian language, and by native (*pribumi*)¹⁸ Indonesians? Should the study of 'modern' Indonesian literature (as Teeuw proposes) begin with the works in Malay published by Balai Pustaka in the 1920s?¹⁹ What geographical boundaries should be established? Should literature by the Indonesian diaspora be included?

A restriction to the Indonesian language immediately dismisses the original texts of R. A. Kartini's letters, as well as their English translations. Further exclusions on racial grounds might condemn to silence the large body of Peranakan literature written in Malay - a cursory glance at bibliographies indicates a number of Peranakan novels dealing with the subject of concubinage and/or prostitution (Salmon 1981). For example, Myra Sidharta (1992: 64) mentions an anonymous text, written in 1903, *Oei Tambah Sia*, which describes 'a young man's follies with married women as well as

¹⁸ Pribumi: One of native stock and not of immigrant blood. (Echols & Shadily 1992, p. 436) This term excludes those of Chinese descent.

¹⁹ Teeuw voiced this opinion in an article in 1972, "The impact of Balai Pustaka on modern Indonesian literature", *B.S.O.A.S.*, 35/1: 111-127, and reiterated it in *Modern Indonesian Literature I*: 14. 'It is no exaggeration to state that the coming into being of the modern Indonesian novel... was largely made possible by the existence of Balai Pustaka.'

with prostitutes in the notorious brothels of Batavia', as well as Kwee Tek Hoay's *Boenga Roos dari Tjikembang* (The Rose from Tjikembang, 1927), 'a story of a young man who has a nyai'.²⁰ The latter novel became very popular; it was frequently reprinted, produced as a play, and later made into a movie. (Sidharta 1992: 74, n. 14) Geographical restriction to Indonesian settings might also exclude the novels and novellas of Dewi Anggraeni, (written in English and set at least partly in Australia) as well as stories such as Umar Kayam's "The Blue Kimono" (1980, set in Japan).

To use Balai Pustaka as a historical starting point would exclude the considerable body of work about the Indies written by Dutch (and other) authors from about 1850 – what E. M. Beekman has called 'a literature written by or about European colonialists in Southeast Asia prior to the Second World War.' (Nieuwenhuys 1982: xiv). The exclusion of the plantation novels written in the 1920s and 1930s by László Székely and his wife Madelon Lulofs would erase contemporary narratives of the relationships between European plantation officials and their concubine-housekeepers or *nyai*. This would seem a glaring omission, given that at least two scholars have noted that there is no native coolie discourse relating to the plantation culture of Deli, on Sumatra's East Coast. Anthony Reid, in the foreword to Madelon Lulofs' *Coolie* (1982: vii) comments that:

... *Coolie* springs fresh and direct from a wealth of experience on the estates. We need have no doubt that all of the incidents described were real ones... The labourers of Sumatra left no memoirs of their own. Whatever the limitations of this book, we have no better material for attempting to visualise the extraordinarily harsh world of the Sumatran estate labour force in the early decades of this century.

Jan Breman (1989: 12) also notes that:

I do not know of any contemporary documents that describe the life and work of the coolies from the inside such as told by Tran Tu Binh, a Vietnamese coolie on a rubber plantation in French Indo-China at the end of the twenties... The counterpoint perspective that his story provides could never have come out of Sumatra's East Coast, where labour had no human value.

To ignore three hundred and fifty years of Dutch presence in Indonesia would be to obliterate the interesting, if exploitative relationships engendered (literally) by a hybrid and colonised society. Jean Gelman Taylor (1996: 229), for example,

²⁰ Kwee Tek Hoay, 1886 –1951. See Suryadinata 1995: 71-72 for a biography of this writer.

considers that 'almost the entire history of the Dutch in the Indies prior to 1870 is the history of men and their relationships with local women.'

Scholars of Dutch literature, particularly colonial Indies literature, have engaged in similar debates to those I have described; the problems of terminology, corpus of texts, historical and geographical limits, the definition of "colonial", and whether texts by repatriated Dutch writers should be included. Beekman, as well as other Dutch scholars, argue that the 'historical and psychological confrontation of East and West might well be considered the common thread, even the backbone, running through both colonial and post-colonial literatures.' (Dolk 1998: 215) While at first this was illustrated in literature by the conflicted relationship between the Javanese aristocracy and the Dutch colonial civil servant, for example in Multatuli's *Max Havelaar* (1860) and Louis Couperus' *The Hidden Force* (1900), from the turn of the twentieth century the metaphor for the 'uneasy alliance of these antithetical forces' (Dolk 1998: 215) became the civil servant / planter and his housekeeper/concubine or *nyai*. Locher-Scholten (1992: 265) reinforces this metaphor: 'This masculine character of colonialism is reflected in language. Colonialists invaded 'virgin' countries and 'penetrated' the interior. In the colony... they met their sexual counterpart... The European view of the East was largely imbued with sexual motifs.'

In terms of chronological parameters I have looked at images of indigenous women in selected works of Dutch Indies literature from 1892 to 1954 (the publication date of Rob Nieuwenhuys' novel *Faded Portraits*, which in my opinion forms a fitting finale to Dutch experience in the Indies, a nostalgic account of the decline of both Dutch and Eurasian supremacy), and in Malay and Indonesian literature from 1896 to 1998. Finally, I have examined the revolutionary works of young writers (1998 – 2005) who transgress the boundaries of propriety as alluded to by *kodrat wanita*, and explore new themes, mainly through their novels and short stories.

After 1954, only works by Indonesian authors (including the Indonesian diaspora)²¹ have been analysed. To include work by western authors (particularly fleeting visitors to Indonesia) would be to invite confusion about conflicting perceptions of culturally appropriate behaviour for women. To give just one example of these cultural differences: the four young women in Ayu Utami's novel *Saman*, who present

²¹ Indonesian diaspora: Indonesians who have migrated and settled elsewhere. For example, Dewi Anggraeni, an Indonesian woman journalist and novelist who has lived for many years in Australia.

various alternatives to the dominant Indonesian ideal of the chaste, loyal, domesticated wife, would not be considered shocking in a Western context. While the sexual adventures of Utami's characters are not linked to financial gain, from a conventional Indonesian viewpoint their behaviour is socially unacceptable and places them in the same category as whores.

Tineke Hellwig's monograph *In the Shadow of Change* (which most closely parallels the subject matter of my own) is an overview of images of women in modern Indonesian literature, as embodied in a series of twenty-eight novels and novellas. The authors are both male and female, and all strata of society, from aristocratic to proletariat, are examined through her analysis of narrative structures and male exploitation and control of women and their sexuality. Hellwig's findings tend to be negative. One gets the impression that there is no satisfactory outcome, especially for women who do not follow the 'good path', and that surrendering to the convention of marriage or working within patriarchal power structures is the only viable alternative to resistance or attempted autonomy. 'Violating the rules results in muteness, madness, death or isolation' (Hellwig 1994: 204), and 'Women who seriously challenge the patriarchy and go unpunished are oddities in Indonesian literature.' (idem: 239)

My own study differs from Hellwig's in that my primary focus is on marginalized women as they are portrayed in Indonesian fiction, rather than male protagonists, principal consorts or wives. My main concern is the issues of agency and resistance, that is, the ability of the female protagonists to influence the course of their own lives – regardless of whether their entrée to prostitution, concubinage, or other positions on the margins is forced or voluntary. How does the woman on the margins, portrayed as outside the pale of both Indonesian and Dutch society, challenge the dominant order in the form of government authorities, kings, husbands, pimps, employers, or of wives who are linked to the patriarchy through marriage? My literary parameters also differ from Hellwig's in that mine is the only recent overview in English of Indonesian literature (as far as I know) to include Dutch Indies literary texts as an important component of its source material.

METHODOLOGY

The broad groupings of women that I have selected for detailed analysis are by no means exhaustive, for it is true that in the widest sense all women are on the margins

of patriarchy. There will always, of course, be overlaps and tensions between the two worlds. Some women (and female characters) aspire to the centre while living on the margins, or within their lifetimes, experience both.

In the chapters that follow, I engage in a feminist reading of specific literary texts that contain these women, focusing on their presence (or absence) within the main narrative, and their importance to its outcomes. I focus on the markers of their marginality such as origins, rites of passage, dress, language and occupation of physical and social space; their agency and / or resistance to patriarchal control; and the outcomes of their position on the margins of society. I also preface each chapter with a brief historical and theoretical context. Overall, I analyse in some depth 23 novels (four by Dutch authors), four novellas, seven short stories or collections of stories, and, in the chapter on Calon Arang, I include a myth rewritten for children, a libretto, a performance text and a prose lyric. Other literary works are referred to more briefly in the context of the thesis.

The stories of women on the margins will become the central narrative in my readings. In the case of male authors I will take an initially adversarial stance, to see whether the female protagonists are idealized or demonized, or used as symbolic devices to represent (or oppose) the values of the Indonesian nation or their community, or to play out male expectations of women's *kodrat*. How often do male authors dispose of their female characters by the devices of madness, silence or death, and how do they appropriate and manipulate these states to appease their guilt, justify their superiority or bring the narrative to an orderly conclusion?

I will also analyse patterns of speech. Who is speaking, or who speaks for them? Are the women characters speaking in their own voices or are they mouthpieces for the idealizations, illusions and ideologies of androcentric and possibly misogynist authors? Are they Oedipal projections of the absent mother? Where male characters (and authors) are clearly representative of patriarchal control, or engage in overt or covert ideological asides or indoctrination, I will point this out.

In the case of texts written by women authors, as a woman reader, I will engage in a dialogue with the texts. How much fictional space do the female characters have to determine their own lives? Are they merely accessories of males, or tainted by 'immasculation' (the internalization and perpetuation of patriarchal values) by their authors? What are their relationships with other women in the texts? Are the works

empowering to the female protagonists / readers by presenting positive role models? The fate of women on the margins in both Indonesian literary texts and scholarly studies tends to be negative; women who transgress the limits of acceptable social and sexual behaviour usually come to an unfortunate end. To what extent this derives from a tendency by male authors or scholars to embed certain ideologies such as *kodrat wanita* or Islam within their writing will be examined in later chapters of this thesis.

Finally, my objective in this thesis is to establish whether women on the margins in Indonesian literature do in fact, open up the genuine possibility of an alternative to *kodrat*, an existence outside the high stone walls and closed doors of Kartini's elite prison, or whether an imagined emancipation from the restrictions of patriarchy is merely a romantic illusion.

As Catherine Belsey (1985)²² argues in her analysis of Sherlock Holmes narratives, even the most shadowy and peripheral of feminine presences may succeed in disrupting the most logical of male stories based on reason and scientific transparency. It is these female presences, specifically those outside the limits of woman's *kodrat*, that I seek to identify and bring to the centre of attention and analysis.

* * * *

CALON ARANG is the Master Narrative of this thesis, a literal projection of male anxiety about uncontrolled female sexuality at its most destructive. Calon Arang and her disciples the Sisya have been linked with the image of Gerwani, political opposition, and the destabilizing potency of female sexuality. From 1996 – 2004, discourses produced by Megawati's rise to Indonesia's presidency were produced at the intersections of gender, state power and religion.²³ During the same period, there was a constellation of retellings of the Calon Arang story, in novels, prose lyrics and drama, as well as in anthropological discourse. In the chapter that follows, I examine, through various versions of the Calon Arang myth, the confrontation of this marginalized witch with officially sanctioned state power and religion, and the

²² Belsey, 1985 "Constructing the subject, deconstructing the text". Reprinted in Warhol & Price Herndl 1997, *Feminisms*: 657-673.

²³ This situation has its parallel 300 years previously when the last of the four queens who had ruled Aceh for nearly sixty years was removed from the throne as the result of a *fatwa* from Mecca (1699).

implications of this legend for women in modern Indonesian literature. Calon Arang as the ultimate inversion of *kodrat wanita* and her confrontation with patriarchy is the paradigm upon which this thesis rests.

CHAPTER 1

CALON ARANG: “MASTER NARRATIVE” OR “WITCH POWER”?

SETTING THE SCENE

‘Who is Rangda? What is the meaning of this mythological figure, whose power is held transfixed in a wooden mask, whose power is on each ceremonial occasion reaffirmed and reincarnate in the body of the man who plays her? Half a god and half a witch, she stands close as death to the living people. She is there, real, tangible, within arm’s reach, the manifestations of her being are imminent and intimate and fiercely urgent; yet she looms out of the past, enormous, threatening, trailing all sorts of inglorious clouds, an evil nature and an evil reputation.’ (Jane Belo 1949: 18)



RANGDA: Photograph by Jack Mershon

Jane Belo 1949. *Bali: Rangda and Barong*. University of Washington Press, Seattle and London (Frontispiece)

In both literature and performance in Java and Bali, the widow-witch of Girah, Calon Arang and her Balinese counterpart Rangda are dramatic projections of female sexuality, power and magic in its most terrifying shape. Such projections are not restricted to Indonesia or to Southeast Asia, and have a generic similarity. They often feature exaggerated breasts and genitalia, matted hair, female processes such as menstruation, and a rampant libido.

I introduce this chapter with “companion” witch figures from New Guinea and Morocco, which suggest a common psychological origin for these images. As Fatima Mernissi (1987: 42) proposes, they reflect traditional fears of the devouring female latent in all patriarchal societies.¹ This contextualizing of Calon Arang is followed by a detailed analysis of Michele Stephen’s 2001 essay that links Rangda with the goddess Durga, and deconstructs earlier statements by Western scholars such as Clifford Geertz and Christiaan Hooykas that have been influential in perpetuating negative stereotypes of Calon Arang.

In the section on Calon Arang in literature, I present both negative and positive images: from Pramoedya’s 1954 version of the myth, to a constellation of alternative literary versions that rehabilitate this much maligned witch, the scapegoat for all sorts of pestilence and disaster. I also draw parallels with GERWANI, the Communist-linked women’s organization, through narratives that present them as victims of the Soeharto regime, and to the discourses that surrounded Megawati’s rise to power and the Indonesian presidency between 1996 and 2004. Goenawan Mohamad’s libretto, Toeti Heraty’s prose lyric, Cok Sawitri’s performance work *Pembelaan Dirah* and Ayu Utami’s novel *Larung* present more empowering explorations of these themes. The later group of Calon Arang stories is contemporary with recent events, and indicates on the one hand, a shift in attitudes towards women and power, and on the other, a suggestion that in some sectors of society, nothing much has changed.

Michele Stephen (1987: 276) cites an account of a Melanesian witch from the West Sepik area of New Guinea as:

¹ Similarly, Hatley (2002b: 135) suggests that Calon Arang is ‘sometimes theorized as elemental male fear of women’.

...[A] hideous caricature of uncontrolled female substances. She menstruates constantly, even during pregnancy and lactation, and beyond the normal age of menopause... she is sluggish, fat, insensitive, unbalanced in gait and in emotional character, dull, and nasty. She is always dirty, and her hair is tangled and matted. She is covered with the grease of male foods and the sweat of the heat of menstruation. Her genitalia may be massive and deformed. She exudes pollution and "black blood" illnesses from all the orifices of her grotesque body. (F.J.P. Poole 1981, *Social Analysis* 8: 64. Cited in Stephen 1987: 276)

Mernissi (1987: 42) describes the ambivalence of males in modern Moroccan society towards active and aggressive female sexuality. This fear is projected as a female demon, Aisha Kandisha, who 'is repugnant precisely because she is libidinous'. Aisha Kandisha has distinct similarities to Calon Arang:

She has pendulous breasts and lips and her favourite pastime is to assault men in the streets and in dark places, to induce them to have sexual intercourse with her, and ultimately to penetrate their bodies and stay with them forever. (Mernissi 1987: 42)

In Indonesia, the dramatic confrontation between Calon Arang and her male adversaries, King Airlangga and his priest Empu Bharada, may be interpreted as the attempt to demonize, appropriate and neutralize female power by patriarchal institutions, namely, the State and Religion.

In Bali, Calon Arang / Rangda manifests in the Calon Arang dance-drama and the Barong-Rangda performance. In some performances, Calon Arang appears without a mask, as an old woman carrying a white cloth inscribed with arcane symbols, representing her magical powers. She can also manifest as Rangda: a fearsome fanged demon with matted tresses, long talons, bulging eyes and pendulous breasts. In this form, she is the Widow as Pamurtian². It is significant that the masks of Rangda, objects of great sacral power, are enshrined in Balinese Hindu temples, and that it is always a male (priest or *wong sakti*³) who performs the Calon Arang / Rangda roles: examples of the appropriation of symbols of female power by a male-dominated socio-religious culture.

² Pamurtian: Powerful and wrathful manifestation, assumed by certain demonic and divine characters. Bandem & deBoer 1981: 170

³ Wong sakti: men of spiritual power; specialist in dangerous ritual tasks.

In Bali the images of Rangda and Barong are said to have appeared in art and literature at times of social and political tension. Rangda, although feared as the manifestation of destructive cosmic forces, is an agent for the protection of the villages and their temples against the powers of black magic and (with Barong) an actor in maintaining cosmic balance and regeneration ⁴

With reference to her protective role, Bandem & deBoer (1981: 142) identify Rangda as the 'heroine' of the Calon Arang performance. In spite of that, I would like to reiterate that Rangda, as a powerful manifestation of female power -- the demonic -- has been 'seconded' to a protective / exorcistic role and 'contained' within the context of Hindu-Balinese religion and its temples.

Stephen (2001) presents a convincing case, both from the previous writings of Western scholars (such as Christiaan Hooykaas, Margaret Mead, Jane Belo and Clifford Geertz) and her own research and field work in Bali, for identifying Rangda as a representation of Durga, the demonic aspect of the goddess Uma. She also rejects stereotypical explanations of the Barong-Rangda dance drama as a simple morality play depicting the confrontation of good and evil. According to Stephen it is an elemental transformational process whereby the destructive aspects of Durga / Rangda are contained and neutralized through her reunion with her spouse / counterpart, the God Siva, manifesting in his demonic aspect of Banas Pati Raja / Kala / Barong Ketket.

Alternatively, Stephen reinforces the role of Uma / Durga / Rangda as the creative female power of the Universal Mother, and a protective deity for the Balinese community. Stephen suggests that destructive power is 'inherently female and derives from the goddess Durga / Rangda, even when the human proponent is a man.' From a psychological perspective witchcraft and sorcery derive from the mother; while males can have access to this power by ritual effort, it is not inherently theirs. (Stephen 2001: 183)⁵ In another essay (1987: 291 - 292) Stephen proposes that 'as a reflection of the mother image, (the sorceress) is associated with instinctive,

⁴ According to Bandem & deBoer (1981: 132) the Calon Arang dance-drama was created in the Batubulan area, Bali about 1890 and 'drew from a general cultural pool of pre-established materials'. Bandem & deBoer say that the Barong-Rangda performance was created for the tourist trade in the late 1940s; other sources attribute the creation of this hybrid performance to Walter Spies, about 1930. According to Stephen (2001) Barong's origins may be much earlier.

⁵ For an extended discussion of witchcraft and sorcery in Melanesia, see: Michele Stephen, "Contrasting images of power", in Stephen 1987: 249-304

autochthonous powers, both creative and destructive... In the sense that sorcery is related to strength, the status quo, and controlled masculine power, while witchcraft is linked with the weak, the peripheral, and unconscious power, witchcraft will logically be associated with the female pole of opposition.’⁶

Stephen’s text (2001) is replete with images and suggestions of containment and control, and there is the suggestion that the impending catastrophe has occurred at a time when Durga is ‘separated from her husband’, thus reinforcing the antisocial, irresponsible and destructive nature of female power outside the supervision of a male authority figure. It seems that Siwa/ Barong parallels the male sorcerer, in his socializing role: similar to that of Empu Bharada in the Calon Arang stories.

Barong is male cosmic creative power come to meet and **contain the female negative cosmic power** that was unleashed when Uma transformed into Durga and was **separated from her husband**. When the two powers are brought together again, their **negative potential is reversed**, and the **monster Rangda** becomes the goddess Durga and can be returned to the Pura Dalem, where she is **contained**. As long as Rangda and her minions the *leyak*, the witches, are **confined to the graveyard** and they eat only the dead they perform a necessary function—to transform dead material into the basis for new life (*pelubur*). But when they get **out of control**, and start to eat the living through **disease and pestilence, they must be stopped if the world is to be saved**. (Stephen 2001: 178)⁷

Rangda’s identification with Durga is also reinforced by descriptions of her physical appearance, habitat and accessories: long, tusk-like teeth, matted locks smeared with blood and ashes, garlanded with human skulls and intestines, living in the graveyard. Stephen’s seminal evidence is taken from Hooykaas (1974: 71) and has been confirmed by a Rangda dancer who is also an expert on the classic texts of Bali. (Stephen 2001: 169). According to this expert, at the beginning of his performance, the Rangda declaims in Kawi a description of herself almost identical to the description of Durga in Hooykaas’ text:

⁶ Psychiatrist Thomas Szasz suggests that ‘by aiding the weak, the white witch tended to undermine the established hierarchy of dominance—of priest over penitent, lord over peasant, man over woman—and herein lay the principal threat of the witch and (is) why the Church set out to crush her.’ (Cited in Chesler 2005: 161-162)

⁷ Emphasis (**words in bold and italics**) is the present writer’s, and intended to highlight the negative and destructive potential of Rangda / Durga as an antisocial force out of control when not contained by masculine authority.

With blood, as ashes, She was smeared.
And garlanded with human skulls.
Intestines were draped over Her,
She wore a scarf of red and black.
(Hooykaas 1974: 71)

Although Hooykaas makes no reference to Barong and Rangda in his *Cosmogony and Creation* (1974), in his *Religion in Bali* (1973) he conflates the identities of Calon Arang and Rangda as follows:

Popular, frequent and frightful are the dances of the mythological quadruped *barong* and the evil witch Chalon (sic) Arang, at the end of which a number of men in a trance direct the tips of their creeses (sic) against their own breasts. (Hooykaas 1973: 18)



"Bad Witch Chalon Arang": Balinese painting by unknown artist
Christiaan Hooykas 1973. *Religion in Bali*. E. J. Brill, Leiden. (Plate f2)
Credit: Rijks Museum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden.

Together with a reproduction of a Balinese painting which has been given the caption 'Bad witch Chalon Arang' (it depicts Rangda and her disciples dancing in the

graveyard in the presence of Durga), Hooykaas has helped to perpetuate the 'evil witch' stereotype in western discourse, generated by Covarrubias' book *Island of Bali* (1937) and reinforced by Geertz in his colourful description of Rangda (1975: 114)⁸:

Rangda, danced by a single male, is a hideous figure. Her eyes bulge from her forehead like swollen boils. Her teeth become tusks curving up over her cheeks and fangs protruding down over her chin. Her yellowed hair falls down around her in a matted tangle. Her breasts are dry and pendulous dugs edged with hair, between which hang, like so many sausages, strings of coloured entrails. Her long red tongue is a stream of fire. And as she dances she splays her dead-white hands, from which protrude ten-inch claw-like fingernails, out in front of her and utters unnerving shrieks of metallic laughter. (Cited in Stephen, 2001: 137)⁹

Stephen (2001: 182) links Rangda / Calon Arang by suggesting that the Calon Arang story is also thematically related to the transformations of Durga. Both describe female power out of control, separated from male power. Both are widows, but in the case of Calon Arang, there is the additional dimension of a double rejection:

Calon Arang, like Rangda, is a widow: she is first rejected by her husband and exiled to the forest, and then later no one will marry her beautiful daughter, Ratnamanggali. In fact there is a double rejection involved here; two women alone and despised by men, a double female power uncontrolled... The widow of Dirah... realizes the Rangda potential within her, and so takes that form.

Both the costume and the choreography of the *sisya* (apprentices) in the Calon Arang dance-drama are described as unique: Bandem & deBoer (1981: 131) have commented that the dancing described in Calon Arang 'is an inversion of classical Balinese dance: the extended arms, loose hair, immodest and uncontrolled gestures, and nakedness are all antithetical to the deepest essential sensibility of classical Balinese dancing.' Similarly, Claire Holt (1967: 288) remarks of the grotesque performance of the *sisya* that 'these movements do not belong to a dance performance. They are those of dancing witches engaged in the actual practice of their black art.' It is said that the witch and her disciples dance naked at crossroads or in graveyards, both places fraught with spiritual danger (Bandem & deBoer 1981: 130-131). This naked dancing also links the myths of witchcraft / sexual orgies with

⁸ Geertz, Clifford, 1975. *The Interpretation of Cultures*: 114

⁹ I have not investigated systematically the iconography of Rangda / Calon Arang in colonial western discourse. Apart from Covarrubias, Stephen (2001: 138) mentions De Zoete and Spies (1938), Bateson and Mead (1942) and Jane Belo (1949). See also: Eisemann 1989: 293 - 321

the alleged behaviour of members of GERWANI, the women's organization affiliated with the PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia, or Indonesian Communist Party) on the night of the alleged Communist coup of October 1, 1965.

CALON ARANG IN LITERATURE

The text of the Calon Arang story is said to derive from a sixteenth century Tantric Hindu-Javanese manuscript (Bandem & deBoer 1981: 129-130).¹⁰ In Bali and Java the mythic figure of Calon Arang has become entwined with historical fact: she is identified with Mahendradatta, a Javanese princess who married the Balinese King Udayana, and is said to have practiced black magic, for which her husband exiled her to the forest.

Calon Arang is a widow from the region of Girah in the Javanese kingdom of Kedhiri, with a reputation as an expert in the arts of black magic. She has a beautiful daughter, Ratna Manggali. No one is brave enough to propose marriage to Manggali, as they fear having a witch as a mother-in-law. In retaliation, Calon Arang and her students, the *sisya*, perform magical rites in the graveyard, invoking the assistance of the goddess Durga. Girah is overrun by disaster, pestilence and plague. King Airlangga asks his priest, Mpu Bharada, to trick the widow by offering marriage for Manggali to one of his students. The student's task is to steal the magic book (*Lipyakara*) of Calon Arang, thereby appropriating her power. After this, the king and his army attack the witch's stronghold, but she refuses to oppose him by conventional means, and retreats to the forest to meditate. In some versions of the story Mpu Bharada kills Calon Arang and 'redeems' her by bringing her back to life, full of penitence – then he kills her once more.

The conventional moral of the story is the victory of state patriarchy and its associated religious and military power over the dark and subversive powers of the feminine.

¹⁰ There are various versions of the Calon Arang story. Most scholars agree that the historical setting is the eleventh century A.D. during the reign of King Airlangga. The Indonesian version of the Calon Arang myth is based on the Dutch text by R. Ng. Poerbatjaraka, *De Tjalon Arang*, published in 1926. (*Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal, Land en Volkenkunde*). This was based on *lontar* (palm leaf) manuscripts.

As Hatley (2002b) has pointed out, there are several recent versions of the Calon Arang myth, and she gives her readings of the significance of these texts for modern times.¹¹ Hatley notes that all of these texts made their appearance at almost the same time, in the politically charged atmosphere just before and after Megawati Sukarnoputri became Indonesia's first woman president.

As well as presenting my own readings of these texts in the light of the introduction to this chapter, I include an earlier text in order to give perspective: *The King, the Witch and the Priest* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. I focus on Calon Arang in her dual roles as widow-witch / mother, opposed to Empu Bharada as sorcerer and shaman; the appropriation of the magic book *Lipyakara* as a source of power; and resistance against patriarchy.

Black and White Morality: Images of Evil and Malice

Originally published about 1954, Pramoedya's re-telling of the Calon Arang story, half a century before the other texts analysed below, is set in the eleventh century, in the kingdom of Daha, Java.¹² The first chapter of the work depicts a peaceful and prosperous kingdom, free of crime and disease, ruled by King Erlangga. Under his protection are a large number of priests, and he is in command of a large army that has conquered many lands. Erlangga, therefore, is the paradigm of a successful ruler, and also a model of wisdom and thoughtful concern for his subjects.

The only threat to this tranquillity is Calon Arang, a witch who lives in the village of Girah. Calon Arang is described as foul-tempered, irrational and spiteful by nature, with a taste for killing. Her natural malice is exacerbated by her beautiful daughter Manggali's failure to find a suitor. Thus the author also draws attention to her motherhood, but as the source of conflict and disaster.

And it is true, Calon Arang did foster a foul temperament and took great pleasure in the misfortune of others. She was a witch who possessed a mastery of evil mysteries and hence a very powerful force to be reckoned with. As a priestess she bowed to

¹¹ The texts discussed by Hatley are: Cok Sawitri: *Pembelaan Dirah* (1996-2004); Goenawan Mohamad: *The King's Witch* (2000); Toeti Heraty: *Calon Arang* (2000) and Ayu Utami: *Larung* (2001).

¹² I have used Willem Samuel's English translation, from *The King, the Witch and the Priest*, Equinox: Jakarta 2002 (abbreviated as KWP). For the Indonesian text by Pramoedya, I have used *Dongeng Calon Arang*, Benteng Budaya, 1999.

Durga, the goddess of destruction, at whose temple she had many followers. As a shaman, she knew a great number of powerful mantras... *Yes, indeed, Calon Arang was an evil woman but she was a mother too*,¹³ and as Ratna Manggali was her only child she wanted nothing but happiness for her. (KWP 1999: 3-4 / Toer 1999: 3 - 4) ¹⁴

The third character in this drama is the priest Empu Bharada, virtuous, pious and helpful to others, and held in high esteem by the people of his village, in fact, almost god-like. The hyperbole used by Pramoedya to describe these three characters sets up a simplistic moral dichotomy of vice and virtue – on the one hand, the wise, caring, humanitarian king and priest, well-loved by their fellow humans, on the other, the malicious, wayward, destructive witch who terrorizes her village. She is universally feared and hated, and has no thought for the happiness of anyone except that of her daughter.

With her students, Calon Arang invokes the goddess Durga and asks for assistance to send out a plague to revenge herself on the kingdom. Calon Arang invokes Durga twice during the course of the novella: and each time, her students engage in ‘frenetic dances and strange songs’ (KWP: 18), that are described in great detail, reinforcing the image of grotesque inversion I have mentioned earlier in this chapter. In fact, the students bear a strong resemblance to vampires.

Rumor had it that Calon Arang’s followers washed their hair in human blood, this is what made their tresses thick and sticky. This is also why they were always in need of new victims. At their celebratory feasts they were said to resemble a pack of wild animals, fearful to behold. But living witnesses to these feasts were few because, as it was also said, any person caught spying upon them was dragged into their coven and emptied of his blood. (KWP: 31 / Toer 1999: 20)¹⁵

¹³ *My italics*. This is to draw attention to the polarization of Calon Arang’s character as evil witch / caring mother.

¹⁴ Calon Arang itu memang buruk kelakuannya. Ia senang menganiaya sesama manusia, membunuh, merampas dan menyakiti. Calon Arang berkuasa. Ia tukang teluh dan punya banyak ilmu ajaib untuk membunuh orang. Sebagai pendeta perempuan pada Candi Dewi Durga, banyak sekali murid dan pengikutnya. Ia seorang dukun yang banyak mantranya... Walaupun sang ibu seorang perempuan jahat, kepada anaknya sayang juga ia.

¹⁵ Tiap-tiap waktu murid-murid harus berkeramas. Yang dipergunakan mengeramasi rambut adalah darah. Darah itu ialah darah manusia juga. Karena itu rambut murid-murid Calon Arang lengket-lengket dan tebal. Kalau mereka sedang berpesta tak ubahnya dengan sekawanan binatang buas. Takut orang melihatnya. Kalau ketahuan ada ada orang mengintip, orang itu diseret ke tengah pesta dan dibunuh dan darahnya dipergunakan berkeramas.

After the king's troops fail to capture Calon Arang (only three soldiers die in the attempt) Calon Arang increases her efforts. She invokes Durga once more, with a request that the plague be permitted to enter the capital of Daha. For the second time, Durga warns Calon Arang of the danger of such an action: proof that even the goddess of darkness has respect for patriarchal (semi-divine) authority. The plague kills hundreds of people a day, and the king requests the assistance of Empu Baradah to lift Calon Arang's spell.

The strategy is to find a husband for Ratna Manggali – and Bahula, one of Empu Baradah's students, is sent to Girah to ask for her hand in marriage. Bahula persuades Ratna Manggali to give him her mother's book of spells, which he turns over to Empu Baradah. The book contains mantras for good as well as evil. The priest's conclusion is that Calon Arang has deliberately chosen to 'misuse' this power. Following this, the priest uses the knowledge gained from the book to heal the sick, raise the dead, and eventually destroy Calon Arang, then he brings her back to life to 'purify' her soul. The moral victory of the priest / shaman / organized religion over elemental female power is expressed with the same hyperbole that has permeated the entire novella:

Calon Arang... evil witch that you are, you have a great deal of sin on your soul – so much in fact that you can not be forgiven. No, your sins are too great. Tens of thousands of innocent people have died because of you and the number of people whose lives you've turned to misery is countless. No, your sins are far too great for forgiveness. There is no priest in the world capable of forgiving you. (KWP: 111 - 112 / Toer 1999: 88)¹⁶

However, the fact remains that the magic book is hers, and that he has merely borrowed her power. His victory is gained by a cheap trick – even if the author stresses that the marriage of Bahula and Manggali turns out to be a love match. In this tale the witch is presented as having *the choice* of good or evil, and is destroyed because the use of her powers is perceived as destructive and anti-social. Eventually even some of her followers desert her, attracted by the positive and benign power of the priest. Order and prosperity is restored to Daha, and Empu Bharada becomes an advisor to the king.

¹⁶ Hai, janda Girah tukang sihir. Engkau Calon Arang yang banyak dosa. Jiwa-ragamu tak dapat disucikan lagi. Engkau tak bisa diampuni lagi. Dosamu terlampau banyak. Puluhan ribu orang yang tak berdosa mati karena tingkahmu. Begitu banyak orang yang kaubuat sengsara. Dosamu terlampau besar. Tak ada seorang pendeta pun yang bisa mengampuni.

In his foreword to Toeti Heraty's *Calon Arang* (Heraty 2000: vii – xiii), Seno Gumira Ajidarma relates that as a boy he encountered the Calon Arang story through the series of folk tales published by the government publishing house Balai Pustaka. Rangda was the symbol of evil, the spreader of misfortune, and all values were transmitted in absolute terms: good / evil, wicked / pure, black / white. Seno also mentions the text by Pramoedya, in which the author shows no mercy to Calon Arang. Seno's conclusion is that both of these earlier narratives were tainted by the wicked / pure dichotomy. Apparently it is difficult to escape from this deeply entrenched stereotype.

The negative image of Calon Arang has also entered western literary scholarship. George Quinn, the translator to English (1998) of A. A. Pandji Tisna's *Sukreni Gadis Bali* (1936) compares the scheming Men Negara to Calon Arang.¹⁷ Here, Quinn re-inscribes the Calon Arang stereotype on Pandji Tisna's demonic representation of Men Negara:

Repeatedly Men Negara is depicted wreathed in smoke as she busies herself over the brazier in the "hell" of her coffee shop, unmistakably suggesting to the Balinese reader the image of Calonarang hatching her spells... Just as Calonarang's evil wrought sickness on the land, so too does Men Negara's deed bring a kind of contagion on her shop. The very food seems contaminated. (Quinn 1998: 114)¹⁸

However, Quinn's analogy is overly simplistic, because Men Negara uses promises of marriage (constantly delayed) to her beautiful daughter as bait to manipulate the customers to her café. Her motivation is greed – as Quinn (1998: 118) expresses it, she is driven by an uncontrollable lust for financial profit, whereas Calon Arang's primary agenda is to secure a respectable marriage for Manggali.

The powerful depiction of the mad and degenerate Men Negara in the final scenes of *Sukreni* admittedly bears a superficial resemblance to Calon Arang, with her matted hair, ragged and filthy clothing and wild eyes. I suggest, however, that Men Negara in her madness is a generalized image of mad women in literature. Compare her, for example, with Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, cited in the final chapter of this thesis, 'Silence / Madness / Death'.

¹⁷ English translation by George Quinn, from *The Rape of Sukreni* 1998. Lontar, Jakarta.

¹⁸ From George Quinn, "Afterword", in Tisna 1998, *The Rape of Sukreni*: 111 - 118

What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight tell; it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours: it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face. (Jane Eyre 1847: Ch. 26)

Alternative Voices: A Shift in Perspective

Written as a libretto for an operetta, Goenawan Mohamad's "The King's Witch" (2000) reverses the traditional scenario, as the witch and the villagers are involved in the narration. Goenawan contends that his libretto starts from the premise that Calon Arang and the villagers of Girah would have told a different story to that of the king. However, there is interplay of voices from both sides; the voices of the soldiers cursing Calon Arang fade into the background as an intermittent staccato, the chroniclers reciting the official version of her as demonic and responsible for natural disasters, contradicted by the villagers, who see her maternal qualities.

Interspersed with these voices are the mendacious political denials of Empu Bharada, and the anguished, defeated voice of the king.

CHRONICLER I

"She is a curse!"

VILLAGER I

No, she is not.

She is a mother, just a mother.

A mother, just a mother. (Mohamad 2000: 67)

In Goenawan's text, Manjali is married to the prince; both prince and King are seen as gaunt, lonely, ashen, and tortured by nightmares of destruction. The King is confounded by Calon Arang's multiplicity, her shape shifting, her magic, and the power of her glance. These images are abstract, a projection of the King's anxieties and are not externalized as intestines, skulls or other concrete symbols of death.

CHRONICLER I

He walked to the old wall, mumbling, "Girah...

Girah—she of the Book of the Witch

of masquerades, of shades, she looked at me.

I saw all her myriad shapes; restless, fleeting, mad,

screaming, red,
a violent burn of garnets.” (Mohamad 2000: 68)

It is difficult to say which the greater treachery is: the theft of The Magic Book or the strategic marriage of Calon Arang’s daughter. Patriarchal authority has deprived Calon Arang of her two greatest treasures, her daughter and her magical knowledge. Manjali flees from the palace garden, after dying her hair in the bark of balsam leaves, telling the guards, ‘I shall be the King’s witch’. In the end she chooses to return to her mother.

CALON ARANG

Who stole my book,
who stole the pages
of dark and light and blurred images,
of the failed and the sad?
It may be Death?
In the morning I saw battered bodies of bats
raining down
like tattered bark
of a thousand trees. (Mohamad 2000: 69)

As McGlynn (2000: 43) reminds us, when commenting on “The King’s Witch”:

‘[H]istory, even fictional history, is a synthesis of different voices, not just one; and we should be suspicious if the only story is the one told by the officials. In addition... traditional stories often end with the king winning, but this does not always have to be so. And even when they win, the powerful cannot silence the story told by ordinary people.’

This shift in perspective is true not only of Goenawan’s libretto, but of other literary works about Calon Arang from 1999 – 2004 discussed below: a reversal of the ‘evil witch’ image as a feminized threat lurking on the fringes of the patriarchal order, a cliché apparently promoted by both Indonesian and Western writers and scholars.

Toeti Heraty’s prose lyric *Calon Arang: Kisah Perempuan Korban Patriarki* was also published in 2000.¹⁹ Heraty was inspired by a Rio Helmi photograph of Calon Arang, ‘a strong, sympathetic, middle-aged face, not at all the monstrous fanged mask of

¹⁹ English translations of Toeti Heraty’s lyric *Calon Arang: Kisah Perempuan Korban Patriarki* are by the present writer unless noted otherwise.

standard representation'. (Hatley 2000b: 136)²⁰. In the lyric, this image became a focus for many of Heraty's feminist ideas about the repressions of patriarchy, the social marginalization of female figures such as widows, and 'inappropriate' emotions such as anger. The dedication page reads: "To every woman who has contained her anger."²¹



CALON ARANG: Photograph by Rio Helmi

Toeti Heraty 2000. *Calon Arang, Kisah Perempuan Korban Patriarki*.

Yayasan Obor, Jakarta. (Cover illustration)

Heraty's work is based on the premise that if the tale originates from the eleventh century, there is a strong possibility of historical distortion. Therefore (like Goenawan) she endeavours to present events from a different perspective, and to correct the distortions of history written by men about women.

For the last 32 years we have experienced the distortions of history. Who knows what occurred over those 900 years – she may have been a holy woman who was forced into a corner, made a scapegoat, until finally she is presented as a wicked old witch who is the source of calamity. (Kompas 27 November 2000)²²

²⁰ See also *Kompas*: 7 November 2002: "Toety mengaku kisah ini memperoleh inspirasi dari fotografi karya Rio Helmi yang menampilkan tokoh ini dalam wajah yang sendu dan sedih."

²¹ "Untuk setiap perempuan yang meredam kemarahan."

²² "Selama 32 tahun kita mengalami distorsi sejarah. Siapa tahu apa yang terjadi dalam 900 tahun itu ia adalah seorang perempuan suci yang dipojokkan, dikambinghitamkan, sehingga akhirnya ditampilkan sebagai seorang nenek sihir jahat yang membawa bencana."

Toeti Heraty alludes in her narrative to many concerns that will be familiar to feminist readers. I will mention three here: First, the tendency to trap female characters in stereotypes: 'Rangda as a caring mother and / Calon Arang as an old witch, two different facets / are transformed through legend / to become an eternal theme (Heraty 2000: 13)'²³. Secondly, to rob them of a personal history:

how many life cycles has she traversed until now,
but all that remains is this terrifying tale
as if she has no life history
as a little girl playing in the village
growing up to be a pretty maiden, just like
her daughter Ratna Manggali, then a widow –
what other calamities befell her

Do you know what it means to be a widow
do you know what it's like to be an old woman
just imagine, if you were asked
would you be able to answer? (Heraty 2000: 4-6)²⁴

Third, there is the tendency of male authors and academics to appropriate female characters and to exploit and reinterpret them for their own advancement.²⁵

But history is not that simple
Because it needed a scholar to research it
At Gajah Mada University, then write a dissertation
"Calon Arang in the Balinese tradition"
so titled, because the story of Erlangga's Kingdom
has been Balinized; his analysis of a Balinese literary text
"The Epic of Calon Arang" earned him his degree,
Doctor of Literature; our cultural heritage
obtained for him the title of expert philologist. (Heraty 2000: 4) ²⁶

²³ Ni Rangda sebagai ibu peduli dan / Calon Arang sebagai nenek sihir, dua wujud berbeda / tampil sebagai tema abadi.

²⁴ Berapa tahap siklus hidup telah dilaluinya / sampai kini, tinggal jadi cerita ngeri / seakan-akan tak ada riwayat hidupnya, bahwa ia / gadis mungil pernah bermain di desa / menjadi perawan cantik, tak beda dan tentu mirip / Ratna Manggali anaknya, lalu menjanda - / malapetaka apa lagi sempat menyimpannya / Apakah Anda tahu apa artinya menjadi janda / apakah tahu artinya menjadi perempuan tua / coba saja, bila ditanyakan / siapa yang becus menjawabnya.

²⁵ The author of "Calon Arang dalam Tradisi Bali" is a Balinese scholar, Dr. I. Made Suastika. (Yogyakarta, Duta Wacana University Press 1996).

There are echoes here of Virginia Woolf's ironic complaint that every male writer is eager to contribute to the feminist discourse:

(W)hat was surprising and difficult of explanation was the fact that sex – women, that is to say – also attracts agreeable essayists, light-fingered novelists, young men who have taken the MA degree; men who have taken no degree; men who have no apparent qualification save that they are not women. ²⁷

In Toeti's prose lyric, each of the 18 chapters has a different theme, for example, Calon Arang in Balinese Culture; Calon Arang according to Literary Research; Misogyny and Patriarchy; and so on. It therefore resembles a book of essays in poetic format, with academic asides. In contrast to the libretto by Goenawan Mohamad (a critique of state power through the allegory of the Calon Arang legend), the scope of Toeti's prose lyric is more ambitious; it is a series of feminist vignettes, each examining a particular aspect of patriarchy.

The classic storyline and various versions of Calon Arang are not only questioned, they are interwoven with commentaries, notes and reflections on the contemporary situation of Indonesian women, from the New Order to Reformasi. Heraty refers to contemporary issues such as the demonstration of the group 'Voice of Concerned Mothers' at the Bundaran (Roundabout) outside the Hotel Indonesia in Jakarta in 1998, Contraception, Domestic Violence and many other themes. ²⁸

Although Heraty does not explicitly mention the political intrigues that accompanied Megawati's rise to power, in her final chapter she employs what Keith Foulcher describes as 'the political vocabulary of the present day' (Heraty 2000: 76 / 2006: 60):

As a mother who cared for her daughter
she still has a persona that can be easily accepted
as long as she stays clear of all politics

²⁶ "Tetapi, sejarahnya tak sesederhana itu / karena perlu ada sarjana, yang meneliti / di Universitas Gajah Mada, menjadi disertasi / "Calon Arang dalam Tradisi Bali" / demikian judul, karena kisah di Kerajaan Erlangga / telah mengalami Bali-nisasi, analisa naskah sastra Bali / "Geguritan Calon Arang" membuat orang memperoleh gelar / doktor ilmu sastra warisan budaya kita / yang peroleh sebutan ahli philology"

²⁷ Woolf V. 2004 (1928). *A Room of One's Own*.: 31

²⁸ For a comparison of Pramoedya and Toeti Heraty's versions of Calon Arang, see Arivia 2003: 79 – 87

but she undermined the authority of the state
 so in this case became the scapegoat for all calamities
 Perhaps she was slandered by the powers of the palace
 or the 'political elite' as it is called today
 because her daughter whispered too close to the President
 so the mother-in-law was accused of being a witch
 because the elite are afraid of competition. (Heraty 2000: 71 / 2006: 50) ²⁹

Pembelaan Dirah, a dramatized work by Balinese poet, journalist and performer Cok Sawitri, has developed over 14 years, from 1990 to 2004, and according to the author, is still a work in progress (Sawitri 2004: 2). Initially, the script developed as a poem, "Namaku Dirah", (Sawitri 2000: 18-22) and a dramatized monologue, both of which were performed on various occasions, including the launch of Toeti Heraty's prose lyric *Calon Arang* in 1999. ³⁰ In its present form, *Pembelaan Dirah* consists of four parts, three in verse and song, and one part as performance, which celebrate the Mother Goddess and reclaim her memory from the darkness to which she has been assigned by history, as well as delineating the 'journey of the soul'. (Sawitri 2004)

Sawitri's inspiration derives from her respect for Siwa-Buddha beliefs, as well as a desire to reclaim the reputation of Calon Arang as *Rangda ing Dirah*. *Pembelaan Dirah* is based on her research of various versions of the Calon Arang story from old Balinese lontar (palm leaf) manuscripts.

Hatley (2000b: 138) states that 'No direct connection is made in Cok Sawitri's work with the infamous Calon Arang-like images of the monstrous female which the New Order state itself produced and propagated'. Yet in the poem "Namaku Dirah" (first performed in 1992, and later part of the 2004 text) there are references to the classic image of Calon Arang similar to Hooykaas' text: *A sheet of white cloth / A necklace of intestines / Tousled hair smelling of blood*, and her spiritual power which transcends that of military force. *Every stronghold has a breach / Pride / And power are*

²⁹ English translation from Heraty 2006: 50. 'Sebagai ibu yang peduli pada putrinya Ratna Manggali / masih jadi citra yang mudah diterima / selama tidak berurusan dengan politik / tetapi dia merongrong kedaulatan negara / dalam arti: semua bencana dia menjadi kambing hitamnya / Siapa tahu ia difitnah oleh petinggi istana / atau elite politik istilahnya masa kini / karena putrinya terlalu mesra membisik Presiden R.I. / lalu "mertua" dinyatakan nenek sihir / karena para elite emoh tersaingi'

³⁰ English translations of *Pembelaan Dirah* are by the present writer unless otherwise stated.

shattered / At a glance from me / Because my name is Dirah / Just a widow / Not a body on a throne / With weapons for company (Sawitri 2000: 20).³¹

The focus is on Calon Arang as a socially isolated widow and mother, in mourning for her husband, resentful of the wrongs done to her child. No mention is made of the magic book (perhaps the white cloth is the replacement for this) just of the power of Calon Arang's glance, and the inference that she has been responsible for the deaths of thousands of soldiers.

According to Sawitri (2004: 9) Rangda was not a practitioner of black magic who worshipped Durga, but the spiritual leader of a religious community in the village of Girah, with many followers. She explains that the marriage of Ratna Manggali to Bahula took place with the blessing of Rangda, who believed that Bahula was a follower of Buddha. Sawitri also investigates the rationale for Calon Arang becoming the focus for purification ceremonies in Bali – which may have led to incorrect assumptions: 'Wherever there is a Calon Arang rite, it usually turns out that women get the blame'. (Sawitri 2004: 9)³²

By the time of the performance of the work in 1999, *Pembelaan Dirah* had taken on contemporary political overtones. Sawitri reported that the work in its later development was inspired by the attack on Megawati's party headquarters in 1996 by supporters of the Soeharto regime. As Hatley (2002b) points out, there are parallels between Calon Arang and Megawati, as victims of political violence and slander by the dominant patriarchal forces of the state and religion. Sawitri's conclusion, after studying various versions of the narrative, is that that Calon Arang 'had represented a sect that opposed King Airlangga and his priest Mpu Bharada on religious grounds.' (Hatley 2002 b: 137)

This has several additional implications: First, Cok Sawitri herself belongs to a minority religion, Hindu.³³ Secondly, by performing the spiritually dangerous role of

³¹ English translation by Vern Cork, from *Bali, the Morning After*, 2000. 'Selemba kain putih / leher berkalung usus / rambut gimbal bau amis darah / ... semua benteng memiliki celah / begitupun keangkuhan / tak terkecuali kekuasaan retak / oleh lirik mataku / karena namaku Dirah / hanya seorang janda / bukan tubuh di atas tahta / dimana senjata adalah kaumnya' (Sawitri 2004: 10)

³² 'Dimana pada setiap ritus Calonarang, seolah terjadi pengkambing-hitaman terhadap perempuan'.

³³ (a) Indonesia is predominantly Islamic; Adherents of the Hindu religion in Indonesia account for perhaps 1.5 % of a population of 220,000,000. (b) To bolster up his political position, which was threatened by many rebellions, Airlangga proclaimed himself a

Calon Arang in person (which required months of preparation and fasting), she has reclaimed this role, with all its powerful associations, for women.

As an extension of the theme of political stigmatization of women I now turn to Sylvia Tiwon's positioning of the Communist women's organization Gerwani (mentioned in the introduction to this thesis as a major source of negative female imagery in New Order Indonesia) and discuss its relevance to recent literary works by Indonesian women.

GERWANI

Gerwani is crucial to this study, because a number of literary texts contain a woman character that is stigmatized or subjected to violence because of her connections with the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party), either directly or by association. Not only did the demonization of Gerwani affect individual women, it also led to the restriction of all other women's organizations except those sanctioned by the state, thus effectively removing the possibility of independent women's political activism. For 32 years the Indonesian Communist Party and its victims (including women) were almost absent from literature. In a climate of anti-communist repression, the officially constructed image of Gerwani as politically subversive and sexually castrating acted as a powerful incentive to ensure that women conformed to the apolitical stereotype of *kodrat wanita*, supporting the dominant patriarchal order at the grass-roots level of the family.

Saskia Wieringa (1998: 144) presents previously marginalized gender issues as crucial to the destruction of the PKI, by focusing on the 'campaign of slander and sexual innuendo against Gerwani... this campaign, orchestrated to associate communism with wild, perverse, sexually loose women and to present the Army under General Soeharto as the virile saviours of a nation on the brink of destruction, should be seen as one of the factors leading to the actual coup, the toppling of president Soekarno'.

Furthermore, she offers a gendered analysis of the events at the end of 1965, which led to the fall of Soekarno. In her view, one of the strongest ideological forces behind

reincarnation of Wisnu, thereby marginalizing the Siwa-Buddha religion of Rangda ing Dirah and her followers. (Sawitri 2004: 9)

Soeharto's take-over was 'a careful manipulation of sexual symbols. The PKI became associated with disorder symbolized by women's sexually perverse behaviour... From this state of chaos society could only be saved by a systematic cleansing of communism and the resubordination of women.' (Wieringa 1998: 150).

Gerwani (Gerakan Wanita Indonesia) was the women's organization associated with the PKI. Set up by a group of young Indonesian women in the early 1950s, its members did not restrict themselves to social issues, but maintained a politically active feminist agenda, including campaigning for reforms of marriage laws, equal labour and political rights and social rights for women and children. In the 1960s the then dominant communist wing of Gerwani propagated a model of militant motherhood in which mothers were responsible for the moral education of their families and for supporting Soekarno's revolutionary goals. After Independence, most women's organizations retreated from the political arena into social activities. Gerwani was an exception.

Wieringa (1998: 147) indicates how Gerwani differed both from other women's organizations and from the ideals of women's *kodrat*, which she defines as 'an Islam-inspired code of conduct based on women's intrinsic "nature"'. By its model of 'militant motherhood' Gerwani subverted the ideal of Javanese womanhood, and offended conservative forces in society (including conservative women's groups) long before the murder of the army officers at Halim Airfield.

An illustration of Gerwani's resistance to this *kodrat* is provided by the following lines of a poem written by a supporter of Gerwani: 'no longer / are we gilded posies / engaging when compliant / exquisite when yielding / enchanting when submissive / to hell 'tis our duty to go / to heaven permitted to follow'. (Wieringa 1998: 148)

Wieringa outlines the campaign of slander that identified Gerwani as the main perpetrators of torture, mutilation and rape of seven army officers in the early morning of 1 October 1965. Carefully orchestrated over three months in press articles originating from army sources, this campaign was based on forced confessions and other 'evidence' from previous Gerwani cadres and others who happened to be at the scene at the time. Statements that some of the victims had had their eyes gouged out and had been castrated by Gerwani have since been disproved by the publication of

the autopsies of the Army officers (Anderson 1987).³⁴ A newspaper article of 12 October 1965 reported that:

...even, according to sources which can be believed, Gerwani danced in front of their victims naked, which act reminds us of cannibalistic ceremonies executed by primitive tribes centuries ago. Let us leave it to the women to judge the womanly morality of Gerwani which is of an immorality worse than animals. (*Duta Masyarakat*, 12 October 1965, translated in Wieringa 1998: 155)

Wieringa's interviews of 48 Gerwani members in the 1980s concur that the accounts of naked, sexual dancing and mutilation of the generals had no basis in fact, and also that members of Pemuda Rakyat who had witnessed the killing of the generals at Lubang Buaya had been beaten and interrogated, forced to undress, and dance naked for photographs to be used as 'evidence'. (Wieringa 1998: 152-154). Likewise, Carmel Budiardjo (1996) gives the testimonies of several women (some very young) who were her fellow-prisoners, (some of whom were connected neither with the PKI or Pemuda Rakyat) about being subjected to brutal tortures, forced confessions, separation from their families and sexual humiliation.³⁵ In the 1980s, the Lubang Buaya narratives, with an emphasis on Gerwani's amoral and immodest behaviour, were perpetuated by the rhetoric of Government publications, and in the 1990s by the misogynist iconography of a museum on the site dedicated to the 'Treason of the PKI' (Museum Penghianatan PKI). (Wieringa 1998: 163-164) ³⁶

Wieringa's conclusion (1998: 160) is that the campaign against Gerwani manipulated 'the collective cultural and religious conscience of the Indonesian population', especially Islamic fear of women's uncontrolled sexual powers, Hindu notions of maniacal female crowds, and male castration anxieties. This ideology of fear instilled by the Soeharto regime became a powerful tool to ensure the subordination of women for 32 years.

POLITICIZED WOMEN IN LITERATURE

³⁴ For further discussions of the misogynist stigma attached to Gerwani during Soeharto's New Order see: Drakeley 2000, Stanley 2002, Pohlman 2005, LeClerc 1997.

³⁵ See also Pohlman 2005.

³⁶ See LeClerc, 1997: 291 – 305 for a detailed description of this iconography, together with photographs of the bas-relief on the Lubang Buaya monument.

In the following section of this chapter I discuss instances of politicized women in literature. During the New Order, even documentary accounts of the events and aftermath of 1 October 1965 (the so-called attempted coup by the PKI) were rare, and include the autobiographical texts of political prisoners, sometimes smuggled out of Indonesia and published under pseudonyms in foreign journals³⁷. In literature, there are rare representations of women affected by the Communist 'coup', for example in Umar Kayam's novellas *Bawuk* and *Sri Sumarah*.³⁸

I refer here only to the extraordinary conversation that the fugitive Bawuk has with her family before continuing the search for her husband Hassan, a minor leader in the PKI. After some sharp interrogation by her family about her affiliations with the Communist Party, Bawuk embarks on a long monologue, which shows how irrevocably she has departed from her comfortable *priyayi* background to share the ideals of her husband. At the end it is clear that she has not said a word. It has been an interior and suppressed declaration.

Those clustered around the marble table were waiting for Bawuk to speak. They hadn't heard a single syllable of her recitation, only the soft hissing of air passing through her nostrils and an occasional sigh heaving from her chest. (Kayam 1970: 15)

39

There is also the case of the dancer Srintil in Ahmad Tohari's trilogy, *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* (parts of which, relating to the PKI, were omitted from the first published version, and which have been available in uncensored form only over the last few years). During the PKI campaigns of 1964 / 1965 Srintil and the *calung* orchestra of Paruk village became unwittingly entangled in communist propaganda, the lyrics of their songs being replaced by communist slogans that they did not understand. As a result, Srintil and several village elders were imprisoned. Srintil remained in detention for two years as a scapegoat and to serve the sexual needs of the army posted in the district. Her subsequent silence on this period of her life will be discussed in a later chapter of this thesis.

³⁷ For example, Sujinah, a former journalist and member of Gerwani, who was imprisoned for 18 years. (Sujinah 2000, *In a Jakarta Prison*. See other references in Pohlman, 2005).

³⁸ See Hellwig 1994 and Hoadley 2005 for discussions of "Sri Sumarah" and "Bawuk". "Bawuk" was first published in *Horison*, V / 1, 1970: 6 – 15. The English translation is by John McGlynn, 1993.

³⁹ Mereka jang ada disekitar medja marmer bundar masih menunggu Bawuk. Tidak sepatahpun jang mereka dengar dari Bawuk ketjuali isak jang pelan jang kadang-kadang keluar mendengus dari hidungja.

In the stories mentioned above, the female protagonists have little agency, their connections with the PKI are a source of shame to themselves and their families, and the stigma and silences that they carry with them last a lifetime. They are presented as victims of the Communist purge and its later repercussions throughout the New Order in Indonesia.

Female dissent / opposition to female power in patriarchal regimes have a long history. Fatima Mernissi (1987: 71 –73) records that after the death of the Prophet in the year 632, there was a broad movement of apostasy throughout the Arabian Peninsula. One of these rebellions against the Prophet's successor was led by a group of women, (the so-called Harlots of Hadramaut and singing-girls of Kinda) who celebrated the Prophet's death joyously, by dyeing their hands with henna and playing on tambourines. The Caliph's view was that these women were not only blasphemous but also immoral, and he ordered the Governor of Kinda to 'go to them with your horses and men, and strike off their hands'. (Mernissi 1987: 72). Mernissi concludes that the opposition between these women and Islam was clearly grounded in sexual matters, especially connected to the much greater freedom of choice of sexual and marriage partners enjoyed by women before Islam.

Aceh in North Sumatra had close religious and trading connections with Arabia, and in the late thirteenth century was the first part of the archipelago to convert to Islam. In 1699, the exceptional rule of four successive queens in Aceh came to an end, with the arrival of a *fatwa* (edict) from Mecca. One of the great thinkers of medieval Islam had stated that 'Women cannot be allowed to assume power, for they are wearers of the veil and have not complete intelligence' (Andaya 2000b: 242), another that 'seclusion was an indication of piety and that women should confine themselves to the inner sanctum of the home'. (idem: 245).

Three hundred years later, similar discourses appeared at the intersection of politics and gender in Indonesia, with Megawati Sukarnoputri's rise to power, the attack on the PDI-P headquarters (allegedly by Suharto supporters) in 1996, her sidelining as presidential candidate after her party gained a majority in 1999, and her subsequent marginalization and belittling by the press after becoming Indonesia's first woman president in 2000. Given Megawati's strong support from the working class, it is not surprising that her popularity was viewed as a political and ideological threat. The two main objections from Islamic groups to Megawati as president were on the grounds of religion and gender: first, that she was not sufficiently committed to the

Islamic community, and secondly, that a woman president was not acceptable under Islam (Sen 2002: 13 – 14).⁴⁰

Suryakusuma (2004: 145 – 158) gives an overview of the way in which Megawati's gender was manipulated to serve political ends in the 1999 presidential elections: Hamzah Haz (leader of the PPP, or United Development Party) stated that his party was under a *fatwa* not to support a woman's presidential candidacy (reminiscent of the situation in Aceh 300 years previously), while other political parties invoked *kodrat*, the traditional roles and capacities of women.

Kodrat was used not only to describe a woman's nature... but also as her political and social obligations and limitations. In this line of thought, women are not natural leaders and, in extreme views, should be confined close to the home to carry out her duty to raise the nation's children.' (Suryakusuma 2004: 148)

In Ayu Utami's *Larung* (2001), the themes of witchcraft and politics touch on each other, often by allusion. The main character is the grandson of a former shaman said to be more than 100 years old, who cannot die until certain magic charms (*susuk* and *gotri*) are removed from her body. It is significant that Larung, the name he has been given by his grandmother, is also the name of one of Calon Arang's disciples.

Larung goes on a pilgrimage to find one of his grandmother's friends, a renowned *dukun* (shaman, practitioner of various kinds of magic), and from her he obtains some countercharms to release his grandmother from her lingering existence. It is significant that the *dukun*'s village is Lemah Tulis in the town of Lebah (according to the basic version of the Calon Arang story, the home of the priest Empu Bharada in the eleventh century), therefore presumably the source of 'white' magic. The bat cave that Larung and the *dukun* enter to find the magic charms is the home of the souls defeated by Empu Baradha.

Larung's grandmother's tale of opposing authority is a small one: In 1965 the rumour that she is a witch, an evil spirit who harbours a snake in her corset is not enough to save her son from being taken away, tortured and killed as a communist sympathizer, presumably on the grounds that he has been doing business with a Chinese shopkeeper. Later, the army returns to take her daughter-in-law, based on rumours that

⁴⁰ For extended discussions of the political and gender issues surrounding Megawati's presidency, see: Suryakusuma 2004, "Confronting Kodrat", in *Sex, Power and Nation*: 127 – 158, and Sen 2002, "The Mega Factor in Indonesian Politics".

she is Gerwani, rumours embellished with fictions about teaching the women to dance naked and to seduce men into becoming Communists⁴¹. The old woman stands at the door and faces the troops. This time she succeeds in protecting her family:

I stood at the door and gazed towards the sea when I heard that those butchers were on their way. I was already waiting for them when they arrived to take my daughter-in-law... Then I said to the troops that came: I am the oldest in this village. My daughter-in-law is not Gerwani. And even if she was Gerwani, she has a baby to bring up. I am Gerwani. And then they went away. (Utami 2001: 70) ⁴²

I now discuss briefly two recent performances of the Calon Arang story. The first, produced by the Surakarta-based theatre group Gedag-Gedig, was developed without prior knowledge of other recent literary adaptations of the myth, although according to Hatley (2005: 62) the playwright may have been 'similarly influenced by contemporary anti-authoritarian political sentiment and outrage over state violence against women'. This performance depicted Calon Arang as 'a strong, intelligent woman attempting to defend her rights and those of her daughter, and the king's men sent to kill her as bumbling macho fools' (idem).

The second performance took place at Taman Ismail Marzuki in April 2006. Featuring two of Indonesia's leading dancers, Retno Maruti and Bulantrisma Djelantik, it was a hybrid version of the Javanese court dance *Bedaya Ketawang* and the Balinese Calon-Arang myth.

It is worth noting two different interpretations of the TIM performance. The *Jakarta Post* (22 April 2006) published a stereotypical account of 'a rip-roaring Balinese legend of a woman scorned who spreads death and destruction in an ancient kingdom', while her counterpart is 'Calon Arang's nemesis, Empu Baradha (sic), who eventually puts a stop to her wicked ways.' Carla Bianpoen suggests a different angle. The strengthening of the ties that once linked Java and Bali, through reminders that the Calon Arang tale originated in the Javanese kingdom of Kediri, and that Erlangga was the son of a Balinese prince, Udayana, apparently invest the collaborative dance

⁴¹ Obviously a reference to the fictions about Gerwani created after October 1965

⁴² Maka aku berdiri di muka pintu dan memandang ke arah laut ketika aku tahu para algojo itu dalam perjalanan. Telah kutunggu sebelum mereka tiba untuk mengambil menantuku juga... Lalu kataku pada rombongan yang datang: aku yang tertua di kampung ini. Menantuku bukan gerwani. Kalaupun dia gerwani, dia punya bayi yang harus dibesarkan. Tapi akulah yang gerwani. Lalu mereka pergi. (Translation to English by the present writer).

described above with a nationalistic subtext: 'unity in diversity, the nation's sacred concept that is currently felt to be at risk'. (Heraty 2006: v)

The differences in these interpretations of Calon Arang performances draw attention to continuing ambivalence towards the widow-witch of Girah. Like *kodrat wanita*, she attracts additional layers of meaning depending on the agenda of her interpreter.

Recent portrayals of Calon Arang / Rangda in literature and theatre show a dramatic reversal of the grotesque, antisocial image that appeared in Pramoedya's work of 50 years earlier. There is an emerging acknowledgement that the political and social oppression and repression of women is unjust, including attempts to silence challenges to patriarchal authority by the use of violence or rhetoric. Indonesian poets, novelists and dramatists, as well as scholars (not only women) are beginning to rewrite an alternative script, by reclaiming and celebrating female mythology and history, including the 'dark' side of the feminine still portrayed as the Monstrous (M)other.⁴³

Images of wicked, castrating sorceresses on the periphery of civilized society, scapegoats for chaos, instability and misfortune, are being replaced with images of women as powerful, autonomous beings who not only continue to resist definition, but have the agency to determine their life choices and to demand respect from society for these choices.

* * * *

In the next chapter I analyze two related categories of women on the margins: *selir*, minor wives of Javanese aristocrats, and *nyai*, or housekeeper-concubines to Dutch and Chinese men during the colonial period in Indonesia. As with Calon Arang, *nyai* were often suspected of using the 'black arts'. 'The Indonesian *nyai* swiftly entered myth in the nineteenth century, the subject of fantasies as seducer of hapless European men by means of potions and magic, and popularly suspect as poisoner of the rival or bride who replaced her (Taylor 1983: 148).

⁴³ Monstrous (M)other: A neologism created by the present writer. It is a hybrid of monstrosity, the feminine as Other, and the Universal Mother.

CHAPTER 2

CONSORTS, CONCUBINES AND COURTESANS

SETTING THE SCENE

'Referred to as *nyai* in Java and Sumatra, *congai* in Indochina, and *petite épouse* throughout the French empire, the colonized woman living as a concubine to a European man formed the dominant domestic arrangement in colonial cultures through the early 20th century. Unlike prostitution, which could and often did result in a population of syphilitic and therefore non-productive European men, concubinage was considered to have a stabilizing effect on political order and colonial health – a relationship that kept men in their barracks and bungalows, out of brothels and less inclined to perverse liaisons with one another.' (Ann Laura Stoler 1990: 40)

In this chapter I analyze and compare two separate but related alternatives to women's *kodrat*: first, the polygamous phenomenon of *selir* (minor, or secondary wives) attached to indigenous aristocratic and court society in the Indonesian archipelago; and secondly, the role of *nyai* (concubines) who were sexual companions and housekeepers to European and Chinese men during the colonial period in the Netherlands Indies.

The arrival of Islam in the archipelago introduced a series of prescriptions, including the limiting of the number of 'primary' wives a ruler was permitted (usually four). However, there were numerous other women who served as sexual retainers in Indonesian courts, albeit with differing degrees of status and of formal recognition for themselves and their children.

Concubinage in the Netherlands Indies in the VOC¹ and colonial period had its origins in domestic slavery, as in other colonized Asian countries. The system of concubinage, which referred to extra-marital cohabitation between foreign² men and Asian women, encompassed a variety of arrangements, including sexual access, demands on domestic labour, and legal rights to children of the union (Stoler 1990: 40). In the Indies these Asian

¹ VOC: United East India Company

² Chinese immigrants to the Indies also took *nyai* as housekeeper-concubines (sometimes called *ca-bau-kan*, in the case of those women who worked intermittently as entertainers). Later in this chapter I analyze a novel that describes the life of a *ca-bau-kan*, an entertainer and concubine to members of the urban Chinese business community in twentieth century Indonesia.

concubines were known as *nyai*, and, until the end of the nineteenth century, were common in the cities, army barracks and on the plantations of Java and Sumatra.³

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, François Valentijn reported that ‘there is hardly a single Hollander of any consideration in Java who does not have a concubine – a way of life that is deplorable and which can give very little inducement to the natives to become converts to our religion.’ (Cited in Fox 1983: 255)

Thus, while the tradition of minor wives is indigenous and has a long history in Indonesia (as elsewhere in Southeast Asia), concubinage is an interracial and colonial phenomenon dating from the Dutch presence in the Indonesian archipelago (1599 – 1950). From the early seventeenth century, the two traditions existed simultaneously.

In this chapter, after providing a brief historical and scholarly context for *selir* and *nyai*, I extend my analyses to relevant works of literature, with particular attention to origins and the re-inscribing of identity, rites of passage and codes of behaviour, the existence of female subtexts, and issues of resistance and agency. In the case of *selir*, the principal texts are the novels *Roro Mendut* (1983) and *Gadis Pantai* (1987). The section on concubines in literature draws on a wide range of texts, from *Nyai Dasima* by G. Francis (1896) to Remy Sylado’s *Ca-bau-kan* (1999), and includes a discussion of relevant Dutch colonial novels from the 1930s. The historical breadth of this approach highlights changing attitudes to both institutions, which by the early years of the twentieth century were inviting criticism from modernizing nationalists such as Tirto Adhi Soerja (Coté 1998: 28).

SELIR

Anthony Reid (1998: 637) has noted the tendency of male rulers in early modern Southeast Asia to surround themselves with large numbers of women, including queens, “secondary wives”, concubines, bodyguards, entertainers and advisors. The king of Angkor was reputed to have five thousand women in his palace, Iskandar Muda of Aceh three thousand, and Sultan Agung of Mataram ten thousand.

As for the castle, no man goes beyond the great courtyard where the King has his lodgings. He uses women guards both within the castle and in his service generally. They

³ See Taylor (1996: 226, n.2): ‘*Nyai* was the term used by Dutch and Indonesian to designate the indigenous woman employed as housekeeper for a European man living as a bachelor and implied the status of mistress or concubine. In an Indonesian context, the term signifies the wife of a *kiyayi*, or Muslim religious leader.’

are said to number three thousand, and rarely leave the castle... As well as these, the King has his wives and concubines, who are numerous, and amongst them there are twenty women who are the legitimate daughters of kings that he has pillaged. (Augustin de Beaulieu, cited in Reid 1995: 69)

The above account by a French visitor to the court of Iskandar Muda in Aceh in 1621 illustrates the extent to which Southeast Asian rulers were dependent on the services of women in the seventeenth century. While not all these women were involved in sexual services to royalty, their sheer numbers, as well as their relative seclusion, may have given visitors the impression of extensive harems. Carey & Houben (1992: 18) note that in the Mataram court in the early eighteenth century, the more than 10,000 women domiciled in the *kraton* area included 3,000 old women responsible for controlling the exits and entrances, 3,000 female slaves in the service of the ruler's official and unofficial wives, and 4,000 handicraft workers. In addition, European visitors from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries remarked on the corps of highly trained *prajurit estri* or female soldiers, who attended on the rulers both inside and outside the courts of Central Java (Carey & Houben 1992: 18 – 19).

Kumar's 1980 essay has particular relevance to this thesis as it draws on an account by a woman writer, and is a manuscript diary written in verse, covering a decade (1781 – 1791).⁴ Nothing is known of the writer herself, except that she was a 'lady scribe and soldier', a member of the *prajurit estri* or female bodyguard of Pangeran Adipati Mangkunegara I.

From the evidence of the diary, Kumar concludes that Mangkunegara's *kraton* (citadel) accommodated a considerable number of *selir*.⁵ The term '*selir*' derives from a word meaning 'chosen'. Kumar emphasizes that neither of the terms used by European writers -- 'concubine' or 'secondary wife' -- adequately describe the *selir*'s position, and, significantly, that 'the designation "concubine" wrongly suggests that there was a social stigma attached to these women'. (Kumar 1980: 18-19). It was customary for a *selir* to be married only when pregnancy became evident (at about three months) and she would then be known as a *garwa selir* (chosen wife). The diary records such marriages on a number of occasions, sometimes involving more than one *selir* (Kumar 1980: 18-19). However, a *selir* might later be divorced if the Prince wished to marry another woman, (such as a *garwa padmi*, or wife of equal rank) in order to keep his marriages within the Islamic limits of four at one time.

⁴ The original manuscript (303 pages) is in book form on Javanese bark paper. Collection: KITLV no 231, Leiden.

⁵ The actual number of *selir* at Mangkunegara's *kraton* is not recorded, but Kumar notes that the Sunan of Surakarta 'restricted' himself to twelve.

The diarist further defines the *selir* as '*abdi selir*', suggesting a relationship of service rather than partnership; this term also clearly distinguishes the *selir* from slaves or '*budak*' (Kumar 1980: 19).

It is clear that the *selir* and *garwa selir* had a public presence within the hierarchy of the kraton, rather than being sequestered members of a royal 'harem'. A passage in the diary describes the attendance of the *selir* at a special celebration, the *kenduren mulud*, as follows:

All the *selir* were present,
along with the young children,
the grandchildren of the right and of the left.
The *selir* sat behind in orderly formation,
watching the revelers... (Kumar 1980: 22) ⁶

Carey & Houben (1992: 25) confirm that Central Javanese rulers could have up to four primary / official wives (*ratu*) and numerous unofficial wives (*garwa ampeyan / selir*).⁷ Pakubuwana V (r. 1820-1823) had twelve 'principal' *selir* of royal or *priyayi* blood, who were never allowed to leave the court. The 'second-class' *selir*, described by Carey & Houben (1992: 25 - 26) as 'a more heterogeneous group', included *serimpi* dancers and a large number of additional *selir*, chosen for their 'good looks and sexual prowess', whereas principal consorts were 'betrothed less for their beauty than for political benefits which were thought might accrue from the match.'

Nancy Florida's 1995 discussion of a nineteenth century manuscript from the royal court of Surakarta (Solo)⁸ also confirms that Modern Javanese kings could have up to four primary wives (*pramèswari*) and an unlimited number of 'lower wives' (*ampéyan / priyaytundalem*) who were legally wed for certain periods of time to legitimize their children (who, however, were of lower rank than the offspring of queens).⁹ Florida (1995: 102 n.31)

⁶ Kumar (1980: 22 f/n 123) notes that the 'grandchildren of the right are descendants through the primary wives, and those of the left, descendants of *selir*'.

⁷ Pakubuwana IV (Surakarta, r. 1788 - 1820) had two Ratu and more than 25 *selir*; Hamengkubuwana II (Yogyakarta,) had four Ratu and about 30 *selir*. (Carey & Houben 1992: 25).

⁸ Babad Jaka Tingkir, Surakarta, 1829. MS. SP 214 Ca; SMP KS 78. Florida 1995: 428

⁹ Florida notes that the *ampéyan* were married by Islamic law, but not by Kraton ceremony. The "travelling marriage license" was reserved for *selir*, who could be divorced when the licence was needed to marry another *selir*.

concurs that 'concubine' is a mistranslation and that there is 'no English equivalent that might designate this connubial status'.¹⁰

From the above examples, it may be seen that European visitors had no adequate framework for understanding the *selir* (or, indeed, other women) within the female hierarchy of the Javanese courts, other than as concubines or, at best, secondary wives. Contemporary scholars also acknowledge the use of 'concubine' as incorrect and problematic. Therefore, in this chapter I use the term '*selir*' to refer to wives of the second order (as it is evident from Florida's text that there were at least two orders of sexual companion below that of *selir*, with varying degrees of recognition for themselves and their children.)¹¹

SELIR IN LITERATURE

Here I analyze two literary works that focus on the lives of *selir*. The first, *Roro Mendut*, by Y. B. Mangunwijaya, (1983) is set in the seventeenth century. The second, *Gadis Pantai* (The Girl from the Coast) 1987, by Pramoedya Ananta Toer, begins in the first years of the twentieth century. Both female protagonists, although separated in time by three centuries, experience similar rites of passage: they are removed from their origins in coastal villages to serve aristocratic society; they experience the re-inscribing of identity in their new milieus; they have an antagonistic relationship with the patriarchal figures to whom they are assigned as sexual servants. As well as focusing on these rites of passage and the presence of other significant female characters in these novels, I analyze the extent of their resistance and / or agency, and their positions at the closure of the narrative.

Roro Mendut: Resistance until Death

Roro Mendut (1983)¹² is one of a trilogy of historical novels by Mangunwijaya, set in the seventeenth century, when the Javanese kingdom of Mataram was at the height of its power. The narrative follows the fortunes of a young girl, Roro Mendut, from a fishing village on the north coast of Java.

¹⁰ Helen Creese (2004: 52 - 54) also suggests a difficulty with terminology, by her interchangeable use of 'royal concubines' 'minor wives' and 'secondary wives'.

¹¹ The next order of children was born to *lelangen-dalem* ('royal playthings') many of whom were court dancers. The lowest ranking children were *lembu-peteng* ('dark cows'), born of women living outside the court walls. (Florida 1995: 280 - 281)

¹² Page references to quotations from *Roro Mendut* will be abbreviated as RM. All English translations are the present writer's.

From the beginning of the novel, Mendut is depicted as a headstrong young woman, a 'coastal tigress', temperamentally unsuited to women's traditional roles - household tasks and marriage. She prefers to accompany her uncle, an old fisherman, on his boat, to the consternation of both her uncle and aunt. According to her aunt, the world of the sea is for men, women's place is on the land. (RM: 13)

Mendut's coastal idyll is interrupted by the arrival of a delegation from the minor kingdom of Pathi, rumoured to be planning a rebellion against the central kingdom of Mataram. Prince Adipati Pragolo has heard of Mendut's beauty and she has been formally summoned to Pathi to become a *selir*.

In Pathi, Mendut is assigned two maids, a senior attendant named Ni Semongko who becomes her surrogate mother, and a junior maid / younger sister, Gendhuk Duku. Throughout the novel, Mendut's primary relationships are with these two female companions. In fact, *Roro Mendut* could be defined as a woman-centred narrative.

When the army of Mataram conquers Pathi, Pragolo's palace is plundered, and the spoils of battle, including the palace women, are taken to the capital. Mendut is captured and taken to Mataram with her two maids.

The Commander of Mataram's army, Tumenggung Wiroguno, who is ageing (by Javanese standards), is jaded with his existing wives, and seeks a challenge in the spirited Mendut. He asks the Sultan of Mataram one favour: for Mendut to join his harem.

Nyai Ajeng, Wiroguno's principal wife (*garwo-padmi*), is aware of the rumours about Mendut, as Mendut and Gendhuk Duku have attracted attention on the journey to Mataram by their forward, even immodest behaviour. Nyai Ajeng's initial reaction is to defend her position, as she is aware that the positions of principal wife (*garwo-padmi*) and first lady (*wanita perdana*) are not always invested in the same person:

But there was one thing for sure, if Mendut was to become a new member of Wiroguno's harem (whether she would or not was entirely dependent on Wiroguno himself), she should not be allowed to become the first lady. It was true that the position of principal wife would still be in the hands of Nyai Ajeng, however, the chief consort and the first lady were not always the same person. And this was exactly the danger that must be

avoided. She might be prettier, but she must not be more fascinating to Wiroguno... It was never too early to be on one's guard. (RM: 111 – 112) ¹³

At first Nyai Ajeng is determined to find excuses to exclude Mendut from the palace. One reason is Mendut's manners; she is rough and uncultured, a peasant with no refinement. According to Wiroguno's personal female attendant, Ni Kuweni, Mendut is 'striking' rather than pretty. In spite of her wild beauty, her way of speaking is rude and uncouth.

At the celebration of Wiroguno's victory, Mendut performs a spirited folk dance (*tayuban*) from the North Coast. Mendut has agreed to dance on one condition: she asks to be returned to her mother's house. Her demand is perceived as the height of insolence:

Nyai Ajeng and all around her were shocked. But she covered it up with a patient smile and said, "A future wife of Wiroguno has never proposed conditions".

"And who says that I am a future wife of Wiroguno?" retorted Mendut, really rudely, so that, not surprisingly, everyone became anxious.

But now Nyai Ajeng became stern, "The cannons and swords of Mataram that have defeated Prince Pragolo, that's who says it." (RM: 121) ¹⁴

Nyai Ajeng feels that her husband's choice of Mendut is demeaning, as is Mendut's performance of the overtly sexual *tayuban* dance from the coast. Now it is her task to resolve the situation. 'And now, it was not up to Wiroguno to resolve who would win, Nyai Ajeng or Roro Mendut. Who would determine the final outcome were only Laksmi Pujiwati (Nyai Ajeng)... and Mendut. This was women's business.' (RM: 128).¹⁵ The balance of power has shifted; what was to be determined by Wiroguno is now in the hands of his chief consort. Mendut is now at the centre of palace politics.

¹³ Tetapi satu hal yang pasti, seandainya Mendut ini dijadikan warga baru keputrian Wirogunan (ya dan tidaknya, sangat tergantung pada Tumenggung Wiroguno sendiri), maka wanita ini mutlak tidak boleh menjadi wanita perdana. Memang kedudukan *garwo-padmi* masih akan tetap dalam tangan Nyai Ajeng, akan tetapi *garwo-padmi* dan wanita perdana tidak selalu bersatu dalam diri satu orang. Justru bahaya itulah yang harus dicegah. Lebih cantik boleh dia, tetapi tidak boleh lebih memukau Wiroguno... Kewaspadaan tak pernah terlalu pagi.

¹⁴ Terkejutlah Nyai Ajeng dan semua di keliling. Tetapi pulih tersenyum sabar berkatalah Nyai Ajeng, "Tidak pernah seorang calon istri Tumenggung Wiroguno mengajukan syarat." "Siapa bilang aku calon isteri Wiroguno?" tangkis Mendut sungguh kurang ajar, sehingga tak heranlah, semua menjadi cemas. Tetapi sekarang saatnya Nyai Ajeng keras, "Meriam-meriam dan pedang-pedang Mataram yang jaya atas Adipati Pragolo, itu yang bilang."

¹⁵ Dan lagi, siapakah yang akan menang, Nyai Ajeng atau Roro Mendut, bukan Wiroguno yang menentukan. Yang menentukan hasil akhir hanyalah Laksmi Pujawati... dan Mendut. Ini soal wanita dan wanita.

Throughout the novel, the main conflict is between two apparently unequal adversaries; Wiroguno (male, patriarchal power, representing the military might of the central kingdom of Mataram) and the captured girl (female, sexual charisma, symbolic of the rebellious nature of the merchants and subject princedoms of the north coast of Java). Mendut refuses to yield to Wiroguno's advances (made through the persuasions of Nyai Ajeng) and is consistently rude and recalcitrant. When Mendut fails to attend a magnificent military tournament (which includes a public display of his *selir*) intended to impress a visiting delegation from Cirebon (as well as Mendut), Wiroguno's personal obsession becomes political. Mendut now symbolizes the necessity of keeping the people of the North Coast under control and ensuring their obedience to the Sultan of Mataram.

Roro Mendut was not only Roro Mendut as physical beauty, but as the embodiment of the spirit of the north coast, the maritime people with their wagons loaded with merchandise... Roro Mendut was rebellion. Roro Mendut was the soul of the land of steep gorges, the opposite of the mountain peaks, which must submit to Mataram... One could rape a woman, but it would not be pleasant and would bring no blessings. (RM: 179) ¹⁶

While Wiroguno's determination to get his own way does not change throughout the time-span of the novel, Nyai Ajeng undergoes a gradual shift in attitude. She begins by resisting the idea of Mendut entering the women's quarters of Wiroguno's palace, on the (quite reasonable) pretext of her being too uncultured to be a suitable *selir*, albeit with the hidden agenda of removing the threat to her own position as first lady. Next, she tries to encourage Mendut to accept the position of *selir*, out of concern for her husband's reputation and his agitated mental state. Finally, when Wiroguno imposes a daily tax on Mendut to try to force her submission, Nyai Ajeng begins to feel compassion. She even provides the capital for Mendut to set up the cigarette stall in the markets from which she hopes to pay her taxes.

At first Nyai Ajeng held fast to her convictions; Mendut must leave the palace. Now she wasn't so sure. And fortunately, her hesitation didn't verge on bad intentions, it was coloured by kindness. When a person hesitates, they can also be waiting for the confidence to do a virtuous deed. No! Her husband was not a murderer. And nor was

¹⁶ Roro Mendut bukan cuma tubuh jelita Mendut, tetapi pengejawantahan jiwa pantai utara, kaum bahari dan cikir-cikar penuh barang dagangan... Roro Mendut adalah pemberontakan. Roro Mendut adalah jalur hidup tanah ngarai, lawan dari pucuk gunung, yang harus tunduk di bawah Mataram... Perempuan dapat saja diperkosa, tetapi lalu tidak nikmat dan tidak membawa berkat.

Nyai Ajeng. And so it turned out that Roro Mendut and her maids obtained an ideal selling position for their market stall, near the cockfighting arena. (RM: 225) ¹⁷

Mendut promotes her wares behind a pink curtain, like a sort of shadow theatre performance, accompanied by suggestive imagery and movements. The women in the markets are at first offended by 'the evil spirit from Pathi' ('si Kuntulanak dari Pathi', RM: 230). But the increase in business because of the large number of spectators wins out; 'muddy waters make the rice grow faster' (RM: 230, f/n 18)¹⁸. The barrier of the screen only increases Mendut's allure, and Wiroguno's embarrassment, as men from all classes of society bankrupt themselves to acquire one of the cigarette butts that has been in Mendut's mouth. The situation becomes an open secret because of Mendut's unexpected success in her venture, and therefore Wiroguno's reputation suffers further. A village girl has outwitted the great military commander of Mataram by using the power of her feminine attractions.

Nyai Ajeng, in spite of her privileged position in the patriarchal order, represents the 'bridge' between male authority and female resistance, and she negotiates this role with great diplomacy. Her dilemma is how to defend her husband's reputation, while dealing with her feelings of admiration for Mendut, who she sees as a pioneer for the advancement of women:

Roro Mendut in the eyes of Nyai Ajeng was also a kind of heroine. A hothead, it was true, but without women like Mendut, women would remain like the mud of the rice fields, with the sole task of growing the rice. Of course, they would be valued, but still trodden down by buffaloes and ploughed by farmers whenever they pleased. Like the rice fields, praised and admired for their beauty, and the watery plots that reflected the sky on their surface... but still mud that was trodden on and hoed, without any rights except to say "at your service"... (RM: 295 - 296) ¹⁹

¹⁷ Pada hari-hari pertama memang Nyai Ajeng merasa kokoh dalam pendiriannya. Mendut harus enyah dari puri. Sekarang Nyai Ajeng merasa ragu-ragu. Dan untunglah keragu-raguannya itu tidak ia serudug-kan ke arah yang buruk, tetapi ia warnai dengan kebajikan. Dalam keragu-raguan baiklah orang menunggu kepastian dengan berbuat amal dan kebajikan. Bukan! Suaminya bukan algojo. Nyai Ajeng pun bukan. Maka jadilah, di warung pasar, dekat pesabungan ayam, Roro Mendut dan dayang-dayangnya memperoleh tempat bagus untuk berjualan.

¹⁸ Tirta molo malah mawrat pantuniro (air lumpur justru membuat berat buah padi).

¹⁹ Roro Mendut dalam mata Nyai Ajeng toh semacam pahlawan juga. Pemberang, ya, tetapi tanpa wanita semacam Mendut itu, kaum perempuan tetap tinggal lumpur sawah yang hanya bertugas menumbuhkan padi. Dihargai memang, tetapi tetap diinjak-injak kerbau dan dicangkuli seenak petani. Dipuja dipuja keindahan sawah-sawah dan petak-petak yang penuh air dan yang mencerminkan angkasa pada permukaannya... tetapi tetap lumpur yang terinjak dan tercangkuli, tanpa hak apapun dan yang hanya bertugas: "*sendiko*".

When Mendut meets Pronocitro, the young merchant from the coast, and runs away with him, Wiroguno again uses metaphor to justify his pursuit of the lovers: 'Wiroguno needs Mendut, not because of her beauty, but because Mendut and Pronocitro are symbolic of the common people of the North Coast.' (RM: 379)²⁰ For Mendut, Pronocitro represents the freedom of the coast, as compared with the claustrophobia of the palace walls. When the lovers make their escape from Wiroguno's palace, Nyai Ajeng delays the pursuit by ordering that the gates not be too well guarded.

Mendut is viewed sympathetically through the eyes of a woman who feels a sense of comradeship towards her (albeit one who has divided loyalties) rather than being judged by the moralizing interventions of a male author. This is a clever strategy, which deflects attention from the unbending attitude of Wiroguno and allows for character development.

In her heart she admired the girl from the coast. This was a woman with real character. But her task was also to support her husband... Everyone needed to be helped. Wiroguno, of course, but also Mendut and her lover who was taking responsibility for her. Because it was clear to Nyai Ajeng, that Pronocitro had come for the sole purpose of freeing Roro Mendut. If Nyai Ajeng's strategy succeeded, hopefully Mendut would find happiness. However, hopefully Wiroguno's honour could also be salvaged. *Mendut was not the only symbol of the North Coast.* ²¹ And, God willing, as long as the King trusted in General Wiroguno, Mataram would still be victorious. (RM: 354) ²²

Inevitably, Nyai Ajeng's attempt to save Mendut from Mataram fails. The lovers escape to the coast, Wiroguno finds them and kills Pronocitro in a duel. Mendut is accidentally stabbed when she tries to intervene to protect her lover.

Mangunwijaya himself identifies Roro Mendut with Srikandi, the warrior wife of Arjuna in the Javanese epic Mahabharata:

²⁰ Wiroguno menghendaki Mendut, bukan karena ia perempuan cantik, tetapi karena Mendut dan Pronocitro adalah lambang rakyat pantai Utara.

²¹ My italics.

²² Dalam hati ia kagum pada gadis pantai itu. Ini wanita yang benar-benar punya kepribadian. Tetapi suaminya harus ditolong juga derajat martabatnya... Semua harus ditolong. Wiroguno, namun juga Mendut dan kekasihnya yang bertanggung jawab itu. Sebab jelaslah bagi Nyai Ajeng, bahwa Pronocitro datang melulu untuk membebaskan Roro Mendut. Semoga siasat Nyai Ajeng berhasil, semoga Mendut menemukan kebahagiaannya. Namun juga semoga Wiroguno junjungnya dapat selamat juga. Lambang daerah pantai Utara tidak hanya Roro Mendut. Dan insya'allah, selama Panglima Wiroguno dipercaya Raja, Mataram *pangguh jaya*.

With this story I found free scope for projecting in symbolic form the historical conflict between an agrarian culture (Old Mataram in Central Java) and the industrial and trading culture of the coast... (Roro Mendut) symbolizes the fighting spirit of Srikandi, the idea that conviction in love is far more important than wealth or status, and the belief that personal commitment to the defense of one's self-worth, even in the face of death, is paramount. (Mangunwijaya 1991, Preface, *The Weaverbirds*: xiii – xiv)

Politically, Mataram has won, but the moral victory goes to Mendut who, by following her heart and escaping the stifling cage of Wiroguno's palace, has avoided the demeaning role of *selir*. On one level, Wiroguno (as well as the author) depersonalizes Mendut by reinscribing her as a metaphor for the opposition of the *rakyat* (common people) to the centralized authority of Mataram, and of the coastal regions of Java to the mountains of the interior. On another level (as an avatar of Srikandi), the continuous and fearless resistance of Mendut to the restricting code of the *keputren* and forced sexual servitude is a feminist triumph. Agency and resistance ought to be considered in historical context; for example Mendut's failure to attend Wiroguno's military tournament and instead going on a picnic with her maids outside the walls of the kraton, would be regarded in the seventeenth century as a radical act of defiance, and her death with her chosen lover as the ultimate triumph. Another aspect is the foregrounding of close and affectionate female relationships, between the *selir* in the *keputren* as well as the bonding between Mendut and her maids, also Nyai Ajeng's sympathy for Mendut. In the end, the feminine subtexts of the novel become the dominant narrative, and Mendut emerges as heroine.

Gadis Pantai: Loss and Betrayal

In *Gadis Pantai* (1987) ²³ Pramoedya tells the story of a young Javanese girl who is forced to leave her family and village to become the *selir* of a Javanese nobleman and religious leader. Harry Aveling describes this novel as 'an intricate exploration of power relations between classes and sexes, set in the limited spaces of the Master's mansion and the fishing village, at the beginning of the twentieth century.' (GC: [viii]) ²⁴

Gadis Pantai is an imaginative reconstruction of the life story of Pramoedya's maternal grandmother, the Girl from the Coast. She is never referred to by any other name, and indeed, in the prologue to the novel, Pramoedya writes, 'She never told me the story of her

²³ English translations are by Harry Aveling, from *The Girl from the Coast*, 1991. The original Indonesian text is from *Gadis Pantai* (Hasta Mitra, Jakarta, 1987). Page references to English text will be abbreviated as GC, Indonesian text as GP. Another English language translation, by Willem Samuels, was published by Hyperion in 2002.

²⁴ Harry Aveling, Introduction to *The Girl from the Coast*, 1991: [viii].

life. I never even knew her name. This book is based on incidents other people recounted, and on what I saw, imagined, and formed for myself. (GC: [xiii]). ²⁵

The novel describes various rites of passage for *Gadis Pantai* -- all are in some way concerned with loss and betrayal – and through these experiences she leaves her girlhood behind and becomes, finally, an independent woman, knowing that she can rely only on herself. As well as the prologue, there are four sections. Each of these relates an era in the life of *Gadis Pantai* – over a total period of four years.

The first part of the novel deals with *Gadis Pantai*'s forcible removal from her village milieu and her family. At the age of fourteen (like *Roro Mendut*), she is 'noticed' for her beauty, and is married by proxy to an aristocratic mosque official (referred to only as the *Bendoro*), who lives in the provincial Central Javanese capital of *Rembang*. The impersonal nature of the transaction is expressed thus:

Last night she had been married. Married to a dagger. At that moment she knew: she was no longer her father's child. She was no longer her mother's child. She was married to a *keris*, the symbol of a man she had never seen before in her life. (GC: 1 / GP: 1) ²⁶

The symbolic removal from her family is followed by a physical journey; The Coastal Girl becomes the Girl *from* the Coast only when she has been separated from the fishing village, and is on her way to take her place in the home of her new husband. Her parents have no option, and it is clear that the village headman is somehow implicated in this transaction. Her mother consoles herself that her daughter will have a better, more privileged life than the inhabitants of the fishing village, as the wife of a 'great man'. Yet her grief is obvious: not only has the Girl lost a mother, a mother has lost her daughter.

Apart from the trauma of being torn from her family and the familiar environment of her fishing village, 'the bitter smell of the sea, the land and the waves', (GC: 2) the girl is

²⁵ Inilah tebusan janjiku. Pada dia yang tak pernah ceritakan sejarah diri. Dia yang tak pernah kuketahui namanya. Maka cerita ini kubangun dari berita orang lain, dari yang dapat kusaksikan, kukhayalkan, kutuangkan. (Prologue, *Gadis Pantai* 1987: no pagination).

Even the publishing history is that of a fugitive and reclaimed text. The first of a proposed trilogy, it was published as a serial in "Lentera" (Lantern), the literary page of the newspaper *Bintang Timur* between 1962 and 1965. The book was reconstructed and re-edited by Yusuf Isak from microfilm copies of the newspaper text and published in Indonesian by Hasta Mitra in 1987. The other two books of the series have been lost, and Pramoedya declined requests to rewrite them. See "Catatan Penyunting" by Joesoef Isak, *Gadis Pantai* 1987: vii – viii.

²⁶ Kemarin malam ia telah dinikahkan. Dinikahkan dengan sebilah keris. Detik itu ia tahu: kini ia bukan anak bapaknya lagi. Ia bukan anak emaknya lagi. Kini ia istri sebilah keris, wakil seseorang yang tak pernah dilihatnya seumur hidup.

subjected to the incomprehensible life and habits of a man with whom she has nothing in common, in terms of education and social status. From the moment of her arrival outside the mansion of her husband, she is treated with indifference: her mother's suspicions are aroused by the presence of two children, sons of the Bendoro, whose mothers have been divorced by him and sent back to their villages.

She is also confused to find she has acquired a new identity – Mas Nganten or mistress – and her only companion, with whom she is never allowed to become too familiar, is an old woman servant, known only as 'Mbok'.

The relative freedom and egalitarian community of the fishing village is exchanged for a rigid, hierarchical life in the claustrophobic mansion. New authority figures replace her parents: the Bendoro, and the old servant Mbok, whose job it is to initiate new wives of the Bendoro into their new status as the First Lady. Yet in spite of her role as mentor, Mbok is still a servant, a subordinate. Indoctrination and lessons in etiquette, however, are interwoven with tales about the common people, the *rakyat*, which ensure that while the Girl learns to adjust to her new status, she never forgets her origins.

In this way, the servant gradually began to tame the girl's wildness and to civilize her so that she might be fit to be the first lady. Yet again it was time to tell stories. She had already told the same silly stories to at least four girls. The servant told each new first lady about the various princes who were madly in love with village girls. About the girls going to live in enormous mansions. About them leading lives of great luxury. About their giving birth to sons... About the marriage of Raden Ajeng Kartini, and how she had subsequently died and was buried, a few years ago. (GC 36 / GP 36) ²⁷

On her first night in the mansion, the apprehension that the Girl feels when the Bendoro comes to her room is similar to the fear of a young *nyai* who anticipates the approach of a Dutch Tuan to her bed.

The Girl from the Coast quickly rolled over towards the wall. Her heart seemed to have stopped beating. Her body was bathed in sweat. She no longer even knew the meaning

²⁷ Dan dengan demikian bujang itu setapak mulai berhasil menyebarkan keliaran Gadis Pantai dan mentertibkannya sebagai wanita utama. Buat sekian kali ia harus mendongeng. Lebih dari empat wanita telah ia dongengi dengan dongeng-dongeng yang itu-itu juga. Dan diulangnya setiap datang wanita utama baru, tentang pangeran-pangeran yang tergila-gila pada gadis kampung. Tentang gadis kampung yang masuk ke dalam gedung. Tentang kehidupan yang mewah penuh sahaya. Tentang putra yang dilahirkan... Tentang perayaan perkawinan Raden Ajeng Kartini beberapa tahun yang lalu, dan tentang upacara pemakamannya juga beberapa tahun yang lalu.

of fear. She was too afraid to cry. Too afraid to think. She did not see but, rather, felt the man open the mosquito net... (GC: 15 / GP: 15 / 16) ²⁸

Strangely, the marriage is not consummated until six months later. It is obvious that the Girl must be educated and refined first, that her rough hands must become soft through lack of work, that she must learn new habits, how to pray, how to bathe, how to eat, as well as the rules of obedience and subservience to the master of the house. She begins to fill her time with refinements, such as learning to make batik, embroidery, lace making and religious instruction. Six months later, on the night of the Bupati's wedding, the Bendoro consummates the marriage. The event is passed over; the Girl has entered a new phase of her life in town.

The second part of the novel begins when the Girl from the Coast has been in the mansion for a year. Her life has formed a pattern, she is less dependent on her servant, and begins to explore her territory, the garden, and the rest of the mansion. In terms of the difference between the world she has left and the world of town, the narrator sums up:

The last year had brought great changes to the way the Girl from the Coast thought and felt. She had left her fishing village by the sea and entered a world of fear. It meant uncertainty about the future. Entering the city and the mansion where she now lived meant entering a realm where she could be certain of nothing any more. People helped each other in the village; it didn't matter who they were. Help was irrelevant here. At best it was part of the service each man and woman owed the Bendoro. In the village she could say what she liked... Now she had to be careful what she said, and to whom. (GC: 51 / GP: 52) ²⁹

During the second year of her marriage, Mbok is dismissed from the mansion. She is replaced by Mardinah, a distant relative of the Bendoro, and therefore a minor member of the aristocracy, whose position as the Girl's servant is an ambiguous one. Mardinah undermines the Girl's confidence by reminding her that she is a commoner and a peasant,

²⁸ Gadis Pantai cepat-cepat memiringkan tubuh menghadap dinding. Ia tak rasai lagi jantungnya berdenyut. Sekujur tubuhnya bermandikan keringat dingin. Dan ia tak tahu lagi apa makna takut. Bahkan mau menangispun ia takut, berpikirkannya takut. Tanpa melihat dirasainya orang itu membuka kelambu...

²⁹ Setahun yang telah lewat merupakan perkisaran daribanyak perasaan dalam jiwa Gadis Pantai. Meninggalkan kampung nelayan di tepi pantai berarti memasuki ketakutan dan hari depan tidak menentu. Memasuki kota dan gedung tempat ia tinggal sekarang adalah memasuki dunia tanpa ketentuan. Dahulu ia tau harga sesuatu jasa, tak peduli kepada siapa. Di sini jasa tak punya nilai, dia bagian pengabdian seorang sahaya kepada Bendoro. Dahulu ia dapat bicara bebas kepada siapapun... Kini tak dapat ia bicara dengan siapa ia suka. merupakan bagian pengabdian seorang sahaya kepada Bendoro. Dahulu ia dapat bicara bebas kepada siapapun... Kini tak dapat ia bicara dengan siapa ia suka.

as well as a concubine. Homesick and confused because of the constant reminders of her temporary status, the Girl asks permission from the Bendoro to visit her parents – he agrees on the condition that Mardinah accompanies her.

After they reach the fishing village, it is revealed that Mardinah is involved in a plot to kill the Girl so that a noblewoman from Demak with ambitions can marry the Bendoro and make room for Mardinah herself as a secondary wife. The villagers kill the conspirators and marry Mardinah to the village idiot – a parody of the Girl's forced marriage to a nobleman. This incident is a comment on social and class mobility:

As (the Girl) listened to their chatter, she remembered precisely the opposite situation; a girl, herself--a villager--dragged to town and offered to a noble. Mardinah had accepted her fate so easily. How could she? She watched the villagers laugh. Had they laughed at her as she was taken to town? The pain was too terrible. (GC: 157 / GP 161) ³⁰

The exchange of roles between the Girl and Mardinah is also a commentary on the status conferred on females by marriage: The Girl has become an aristocrat by marrying the Bendoro, Mardinah a villager by her marriage to Si Dul Pendongeng, the village idiot. The Girl's new status has removed her forever from social membership of the village. She has become untouchable; her relationship with her parents is uncomfortable. Her only alternative is to return to town and the Bendoro.

The final section of the novel covers a series of events: the Girl's return to the house of the Bendoro, her pregnancy, which coincides with the Bendoro's negotiations to marry an aristocratic wife, the birth of her child, and her expulsion from the house after being divorced by her husband.

The discovery of her pregnancy coincides with the visit of her aristocratic rival, who discovers her presence in the house:

“Why don't you keep her in the kitchen? It isn't right! Not at all! Look at me. Do you think that woman should sleep under the same roof as myself?” ... The Girl from the

³⁰ Mendengar semua obrolan itu, justru yang sebaliknya terbayang dalam angannya: dirinya sendiri—orang kampung—diseret ke kota dan diupetikan pada seorang Bendoro. Tapi nampaknya Mardinah terima nasibnya dengan senang. Bagaimana bisa? Bagaimana bisa? Ia awasi orang-orang yang pada gelak tertawa. Apakah orang-orang kampung ini tak tertawakan aku juga waktu aku diseret ke kota? Tiba-tiba suatu sayatan menyerang hatinya.

Coast sobbed. For the first time in three years, she knew that there was a power greater than that of the Bendoro. And that power belonged to a woman. (GC: 169 / GP 173) ³¹

During her pregnancy she becomes aware of her status as a 'miserable servant'. Her husband lives in the mosque and has his food sent there - it is as though she does not exist. Three and a half months after the birth of her daughter, her father arrives from the village to take her home, and she learns that the Bendoro has divorced her. The divorce is as impersonal as the marriage - again, the Girl has no choice in the matter.

The Girl attempts to lay her claim to her baby, but is physically thrown out of the house. On the way home to the village, she decides to go to Blora - somewhere no one knows her, and to start a new life.

This is the start of the Girl's independence, at the end of four years of living in an aristocrat's mansion. The reader learns from the epilogue published in the English translation (GC: 1991: 186 - 187)³² that she later married a man who is a failure at everything, so she has to be the provider, going from door-to-door collecting second hand goods for resale. It is on one of these house visits in Blora, many years later, that she is reunited with her daughter, Sa'idah (Pramoedya's mother).

Since leaving the Bendoro's house, the Girl from the Coast had had a hard life. She eked out a living selling things; she never saw her family again... Despite her hard life she cherished her independence. She declined Sa'idah's repeated offers to move in with her. (GC, Epilogue: 187)

Her pride and independence extends to the way of her death: leaving her family's house when gravely ill, 'She collapsed by the roadside and died, just as she had lived, independent, and in the open.' (GC, Epilogue: 187)

The Girl from the Coast, in spite of being transplanted into an alien environment never loses sight of her origins. Her status is little different from that of the *nyai*, removed from her family and network of village relationships to satisfy the whim of a man far above her

³¹ "Mengapa tak kau taruh dia di kamar dapur? Tidak patut! Tidak patut! Lihatlah aku. Kau kira patut kau tempatkan dia di bawah satu atap dengan aku?" ... Gadis Pantai tersedansedan. Buat pertama kali dalam hampir tiga tahun ini ia mengetahui ada kekuasaan yang lebih tinggi daripada kekuasaan Benoro. Dan kekuasaan itu berada di tangan seorang wanita.

³² The epilogue, based on a conversation with Pramoedya and written by Marianne Katoppo (August 1990), is an addition to the text translated by Harry Aveling. There is no corresponding Indonesian version in the Hastra Mitra publication.

in wealth, social standing and power. Like the *nyai*, she is eventually discarded in favour of a more socially acceptable marriage partner, and separated from her child.

Gadis Pantai lacks Roro Mendut's nurturing female network – Mbok's primary allegiance as a servant is to the Bendoro, and Mardinah turns out to be a traitor and conspirator in a plot. The 'power that is greater than that of the Bendoro' also belongs to another woman – her aristocratic rival. Unlike Nyai Ajeng in *Roro Mendut*, this woman is not an ally. The *keputren* of Wiroguno, by comparison, seems relatively benign.

Yet the Girl fights valiantly (but ineffectually) for the right for her child to be recognized by the Bendoro and for the right to take her away. She also asserts her right to reinvent her life rather than return to a village that, she has proved, has no place for her. Later, in spite of a marriage to a man who is 'a failure at everything he did', she manages to retain her dignity and independence. Even her reconciliation with her daughter is marred by tragedy – Sa'idah dies during the Japanese occupation.

CONCUBINES (NYAI)

The Indonesian colonial tradition of concubinage was preceded in the pre-colonial period by the more respected institution of temporary wives, as described by Andaya (1998). Later, concubinage was one alternative for emancipated women slaves, another being prostitution. In fact, in some historical sources, the terms 'whore', 'prostitute' and 'concubine' are used interchangeably.³³

Hendrik Niemeijer comments of seventeenth century Batavia: 'For most women caught in the cycle of poverty, concubinage was a temporary expedient, which could be abandoned if better opportunities became available or if domestic life became too violent....' For emancipated female slaves, concubinage with a European partner offered a measure of material security and social prestige, although if the European was already married, there was also an element of insecurity; according to Calvinist norms, 'bigamy was a more serious crime than adultery'. (Niemeijer 2000: 182 - 183)

³³ Niemeijer (2000: 181) gives an account of a Batavian-born burgher who kept a 'whore' in a *petak* (lodge) behind his house, another 'whore' in the house, and was committing adultery with a third woman. 'He repeatedly mistreated his "whores" by beating them and cutting off their hair as a public sign of indecency and disgrace.'

An elite mestizo society gradually developed in seventeenth and eighteenth century Batavia, originating from the cohabitation of Dutch settlers with slave women:

Young men... took female slaves as their domestic companions ... and then, as their career took off, sought in marriage a woman with useful connections... Without the publicly acknowledged tie to a European man, these women would have the status of an Asian. And that, in VOC times, meant the status of subordinate, usually as slave-concubine. (Taylor 1992: 256 – 257)

On the plantations of Sumatra's east coast in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the *nyai* (housekeeper/concubine) persisted for longer because of the ban on marriage for European employees, which was only lifted in the 1920s. The European gender ratio on the plantations of Deli in 1920 was 60 women to 100 men, considerably lower than the ratio for the general European population of Java.

In the early period of Deli's development, authorities considered a *nyai*, or housekeeper-concubine, indispensable for young European employees. Her task was to manage her master's household affairs and servants, as well as to share his bed – thus reducing the risks of loneliness and sexual disease. Handbooks for prospective plantation employees urged them to find local 'companions' to avert the ills of sexual abstention, isolation and boredom (Stoler 1990: 40).

Although concubinage was officially banned in the early twentieth century, the ban was only selectively enforced, and the lifting of the marriage ban was also enacted at different times in different areas of Deli. 'Enforcing the restriction (of immigration of European women to the Indies) by selecting bachelors as their European recruits, the VOC legally and financially made concubinage the most attractive domestic option for its employees' (Stoler 1990: 39). Not only the VOC, but colonial armies, bureaucracies and trading companies and plantations profited from such arrangements. Because local women provided domestic services, employers were able to keep salaries of European recruits artificially low (idem: 39 – 40).

Locher-Scholten (1992: 271) records that some *nyais* in Deli were Japanese women purchased from Singapore brothels, although most were young Javanese coolies who had this role forced upon them.

The female coolies were young, almost all Javanese, and if not openly coerced to prostitute themselves were given few other options. Servicing the sexual and more

general domestic needs of male workers and managers was more of necessity than of choice, given that women's wages in 1894 were half those of men and were inadequate to meet daily dietary requirements... (Stoler 1985: 31)

Plantation owners argued that coolie women were 'whores by nature', and that they would spend any extra earnings on frivolities – 'diversions and cheap ornaments'. According to a letter written to the Minister of Colonies in 1902, a coffee planter had remarked 'that women always had the opportunity to earn more; by prostitution, of course...' (Breman 1989: 108) and another source stated that unmarried Javanese women who could not find a Javanese man on the plantations for marriage or cohabitation 'are free to continue their former trade of prostitution.' (Breman 1989: 191) Prostitution was considered a lesser evil than the alleged pederasty of Chinese workers in the absence of women. (Stoler 1985: 32) However, Dutch critics reported high rates of syphilis on the plantations and appalling conditions in a Deli hospital for prostitutes (idem).

Contract marriages and concubinage were tenuous, while formalized coolie marriages were either prohibited or not recognized. As detailed in Madelon Lulof's novels, newly assigned coolie women were allocated in accordance with a rigid hierarchy of race and seniority, with Europeans having the first choice. (Stoler: 1985: 33)

In the nineteenth century, after the abolition of slavery, men sourced their concubines from the 'free' population of the Indonesian villages. The *nyai* assumed management of the European's household and staff, thus giving rise to the colonial euphemism 'housekeeper' (Taylor 1983: 147). 'It became customary for the concubine to exchange her colored or indigo kebaya for a white one and to wear slippers, the clothing symbolizing her new status and passage from the Indonesian to the halfway world of a bachelor-centered Indies society' (idem). It was also expected that the *nyai* would retire discreetly to the back of the house after serving European guests.

Until the early twentieth century, this situation prevailed, not only in the cities and the plantations, but also in the army barracks (Ming 1983). Once a European had reached a certain level in his profession, he was expected to dismiss his *nyai* and to marry a woman with European status. This left the *nyai* in an insecure position, depriving her of material support for herself and any children born of the liaison (Taylor 1983: 148).

Eurasian children, in Taylor's opinion (1983: 156) introduced 'a disorderly element to definitions of pluralism', their status depending entirely on their white fathers. To be

accepted as Europeans, they required not only to be acknowledged, but Christian baptism, European clothes and European education. The children could also be taken away from their mother to accompany their father to Holland. Stoler (1990: 41) also emphasizes that the most problematic aspect of concubinage was the mixed-race progeny of such unions, who 'straddled the divisions of ruler and ruled and threatened to blur the colonial divide'.

As Breman suggests, racist ideology served not only to 'justify white domination and its continuation, but was also intended to ensure that Europeans stayed on the "right" side of the dividing line'. The custom of planters cohabiting with Asian women was 'in undeniable contradiction to this code' (Breman 1990: 135), becoming institutionalized when managements of plantation companies prohibited their younger staff from marrying.

The institution of concubinage in the Netherlands Indies can therefore be seen to have its rationale first in the restrictions on female immigration from Holland, and secondly, in restrictions on marriage (both for indigenous workers and European managers) on the plantations.

CONCUBINES IN LITERATURE

'Probably no subject is discussed more than sex in colonial literature and no subject more frequently invoked to foster the racist stereotypes of European society. The tropics provided a site of European pornographic fantasies long before conquest was underway, but with a sustained European presence in colonized territories, sexual prescriptions by class, race and gender became increasingly central to the politics of rule and subject to new forms of scrutiny by colonial states.' (Stoler 1990: 37)

The *nyai*, a romantic and tragic figure, has been a continual source of fascination for Eurasian, Dutch and Indonesian authors, as well as for scholars of gender and post-colonial studies.

Here I analyze several literary works that feature *nyai*, beginning with the seminal story of *Njai Dasima*, by G. Francis (1896) and two novelettes (1909 and 1912) in an urban setting, written by Tirta Adhi Soerja, an early Indonesian nationalist. Next I discuss three 'plantation novels' by Madelon Lulofs and Laszlo Szekely (1931 – 1935) within the context of an Indies colonial literature of resistance. Finally, I focus on concubines in two novels from Pramoedya Ananta Toer's tetralogy: *Bumi Manusia* (1980), and *Rumah Kaca* (1988); and Remy Sylado's *Ca-bau-kan* (1999), the first novel with a Chinese theme after the demise of the New Order in Indonesia. In so doing, I set out to identify first, origins and

image of the *nyai*, including markers such as dress and rites of passage, secondly, the attitudes of their male cohabitants, and at the same time, the attitudes of European or Indonesian authors dealing with the theme of concubinage. I also discuss the existence of female subtexts, especially the relationships of the principal characters with other women. Most importantly, I discuss resistance (subversion of the codes) by native concubines; and the degree of agency exercised by *nyai* in the various milieu of colonial Indies society.

Colonial narratives: Deceit and decadence

Tjerita Njai Dasima (The Story of Nyai Dasima), written by G. Francis, (probably an Englishman) was published in Batavia in 1896.³⁴ It is unlikely that it has a factual basis, although it claims to describe events that took place in 1813, during the English administration of the Indies.³⁵ The prose story by Francis became the prototype for numerous variations, particularly in West Java and Jakarta (Hellwig 1992: 6). It was followed by two *syair* (poetic) versions in 1897, and many other versions (poetry, prose, theatrical performances and film) have followed. Tineke Hellwig (1992: 3) has discussed the 'fictitious' nature of Nyai Dasima herself, while Jean Taylor (1996) has analyzed four versions of the story 'in its passage from folklore to popular play, from book to movie...' (Taylor 1996: 226). Taylor (1996: 248) concludes that although there are significant thematic changes in subsequent versions of the Nyai Dasima story, the portrayal of the heroine remains constant, reinforcing a timeless image of submission and suffering.

As Aveling (Francis 1988: [ii – iv]) points out, the story of Nyai Dasima is 'a full-blooded melodrama', invested with black and white morality. It includes elements of manipulation, greed, the supernatural in the form of magic potions, dreams and omens, and the violent death of the heroine followed by retribution.

Nyai Dasima and her English master Edward W. are presented as 'good' characters. Apparently Dasima is an ideal companion, beautiful, intelligent and diligent, who has acquired knowledge of domestic skills such as cooking, sewing and dressmaking from a Dutch woman. She is presented as pure, loyal, but ignorant of her own culture and religion.

She has been with Edward W. from the time she was a girl; he entrusts her with the care of all his property and gives her many expensive gifts, and 'loved her as though she were his

³⁴ English translations are by Harry Aveling (Francis 1988). The Indonesian text was reproduced in Toer, 1982: 223 – 247.

³⁵ Hellwig (1992: 4) suggests that, as there is no firm evidence to support the claim of historical authenticity, it is probable that Francis himself invented the story.

legal wife.' Her material possessions and clothing are described in considerable detail (Francis 1982: 225 / 1988: 1): including diamond pins, cameo brooches and ornamented boxes, as well as sarongs woven with gold and silver thread and silk blouses.

Although Dasima has rejected many proposals from Muslim suitors, eventually it is fear of punishment in the Islamic afterlife that is used to undermine her relationship with Edward W. She becomes a victim of the villain Samiun who entices her away from her idyllic relationship, in order to get control of her wealth and possessions. Dasima's last defences are swept away by the matchmaker's stereotypical depiction of the fate of a *nyai*:

"If he really loved you, he would have married you a long time ago. He is a white man: if he finds someone of his own race, he will cast you off, and take her back to his own country, together with your daughter—leaving you all alone, without friends or family. It's immoral, the way you live with him. You're not married, the way Muhammad said people should be. I'd suggest you start practicing your religion; otherwise you're going to be very sorry one day." (Francis 1982: 235 / 1988: 15 - 16) ³⁶

In the playing out of the melodrama, Dasima has no female supporters. Hellwig (1992: 10) comments that although Samiun initiates the plot to entice Dasima, men are of little consequence in its implementation. Samiun uses a go-between, Ma Buyung, to win Dasima's confidence,³⁷ and to administer potions to Dasima and Edward W., while his first wife, Hayati, and his mother, Saleha, have major roles in the plot to deceive and seduce Dasima. Apparently the two 'good' characters, Dasima and Edward W. are blameless; instead of free will, Dasima's change of heart and Edward W's lack of agency are attributed to the influence of magic potions. The role of magic is further described when Samiun seduces Dasima. 'He had, of course, made use of all the evil devices available to him, especially various magic arts and spells, and she was soon totally besotted with him'. (Francis 1982: 237 / 1988: 18)³⁸ Thus, as Hellwig (1992: 16) suggests, the image of *Nyai* Dasima is in contrast to the jealous and manipulative *nyai* who uses 'magic tricks' (or poison) to maintain her position.

³⁶ Boeat apa Njai takoet sama Toean, djikaloe dia sajang sama Njai betoel-betoel, tentoe dia soeda kawin sama Njai. Dia ada satoe orang koelit poeti, kaloe dia dapet bangsanja, tentoe dia boewang sama Njai, begitu djoega dia poelang ke negerinja dan anak Njai dia ambil, tinggal Njai terlantar sebatang karang, tiada poenja sanak-soedara dan tiada poenja kenalan disini maka itoe Njai idoeep sama Toean ada kahidoepan berdjina, tiada nikah begimana soeda dipesan oleh Nabi Moehamad, haroes Njai lekas-lekas toentoet agama, soepaja djangan menjesal di blakang kali.

³⁷ Hellwig (1992:11) notes that the appearance of a matchmaker (nenek kabayan) is not uncommon in Malay literature. Tirta Adhi Soerja uses a matchmaker in the story "Busono", also discussed in this chapter.

³⁸ Itoe Samioen soeda tentoe pake atoeran segala dijahat dari ikemat dan boedia, maka Njai Dasima djadi terlaloe gilain kepada dianja...

Once in Samiun's house as a co-wife, the jewellery and fine clothes that Nyai Dasima has received from Edward W. are taken away from her. This draws attention to the importance of dress as a signifier of status, reducing Dasima from affluent mistress to co-wife and shabby servant.

"A woman's property belongs to her husband; that's Muslim law. Islam forbids your heathen nyai costume and your blouses, too. You should dress like an ordinary village woman." Nyai Dasima did as her husband told her. She gave him all her gold jewellery and her money. In return she received a floral Thai frogged-jacket and an old black sarong which had once belonged to Mrs Hayati... She was forced to work in the kitchen with the cook, and to wait on her husband, her mother-in-law and her co-wife, like a servant. In Mr. W's house, there were servants to care for her; now she was everyone else's servant. (Francis 1982: 240 / 1988: 22) ³⁹

By comparison with her 'sinful' situation as the companion of a European, the position of co-wife (*madu*), permissible in Islam, is far from ideal. 'From Nyai Dasima's point of view the position of *berjina* (sin: sexual relations outside marriage) appears preferable to being married: an indication that the Islamic standards are being undermined.' (Hellwig 1992: 14)

When Dasima finally shows resistance by asking for a divorce and the return of her property, Samiun decides to get rid of her by hiring a professional killer. A brutal murder follows, and it is at this point that the author entreats his readers to 'pity the poor dead woman, murdered for her possessions.' The author also ensures that there are sufficient witnesses to the crime so that the perpetrators are brought to justice, and that 'God's vengeance' is administered by Dutch officialdom (although Ma Buyung, Hayati and Embok Saleha apparently avoid punishment). Dasima is seen as an innocent victim of her fellow countrymen, who manipulate her religious convictions to justify their greed and even the crime of murder.

³⁹ "Harta bininja ada koewadjibannja jang laki misti simpen, begitoe ada adat orang Islam, lagi itoe pakean Njai-Njai dan kebaja, orang Islam haram pake, sebab itoe pakean prampoean kafir, pake pakean misti toeroet biasanja orang kampoeng. Maka Njai Dasima toeroetin. Dia poenja barang mas-intan semoeanja serta oewang dia seraken kepada lakinja, dan dia dikasi pake badjoe tjita boenga Siam, serta kaen itam bekas pakean Njonja Hajati... serta misti membantoe masak dengan koki di dapoer, serta misti lajanin lakinja, mertoeanja dan madoenja ibarat satoe boedak, tadinja di roemah Toean W. dia dilajanin oleh boedjang-boedjang, dan sekarang dia misti djadi boedak orang...

Hellwig (1992: 10) argues that Dasima rarely speaks or acts herself, but rather *reacts* to the words and actions of others, suggesting that she has little agency. However, Dasima clearly shows considerable resistance to attempts to steer her away from her comfortable role as Mr. W's mistress. It takes the combined efforts of Saleha, Ma Buyung and Hayati over a period of time (as well as recourse to black magic) to persuade her to betray her commitment to her master. Similarly, once she has made up her mind to leave Edward W. and marry Samiun, the pleas and tears of Mr. W. are to no avail. After she becomes a second wife, however, she apparently submits to the ill treatment and insults meted out to her by the other women in Samiun's household. Ironically, it is her insistence on her own rights that leads to Samiun's decision to murder her. It is her wealth, her naiveté and the de facto nature of her relationship with Edward W. that is her undoing.

Tirto Adhi Soerja (one of Indonesia's first nationalists and the model for Minke, the main character in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's tetralogy *Bumi Manusia*, *Anak Semua Bangsa*, *Jejak Langka* and *Rumah Kaca* (1980 – 1988) wrote several works of fiction, several of them with *nyai* as central characters. I discuss two of these stories here: "Cerita Nyai Ratna" (1909) and "Busono" (1912).⁴⁰ Joost Coté (1998: 1 - 2) suggests that the convention of the *nyai* story, which had been a convenient literary framework for colonial and anti-colonial discourse, was inadequate to contain the broad didacticism and moral ambiguities of Tirto's writings. However, both stories use the *nyai* framework as a starting point for Tirto's explorations of modernity in an urban setting. It is the contradictions and ambiguities in gender relations, as reflected in these stories, which I explore in this chapter.

It is probable that both stories are to some extent autobiographical, as there is some overlapping of characters and themes. Both involve students from STOVIA, the medical school for natives in Batavia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and, in the case of "Busono", a successful journalist.⁴¹ The two *nyai* in the stories, Ratna and Raden Sitti Ningrum, are attached to Europeans who are shadowy, avuncular and often absent figures on the margins of the story, apparently useful as a means of material support

⁴⁰ Both stories were originally published in serial form in Tirto's newspaper *Medan Priyayi*, and republished, albeit in incomplete form, in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's biography of Tirto Adhi Soerja, *Sang Pemula* (Hasta Mitra 1986). In this chapter, I have used English translations from *RIMA*, 32/2, 1998 (cited as 'Busono'), with the Indonesian text from *Sang Pemula*. (cited as *Sang Pemula*)

⁴¹ "Busono" is of particular interest, as (according to Pramoedya) it is a fragment of a proposed autobiography of Tirto.

only.⁴²The *nyais*' other lovers are courteous to the extent of not arousing suspicion, but apart from that there is little respect for the Dutch.

Outside this framework of material support the *nyais* have considerable freedom, socializing with the medical students from STOVIA and often taking them as lovers. In fact, there seems to be great competition among the *nyai* for the attentions of their favourite students. There is a hierarchy of relentless parasitism; prosperous Europeans support their *nyai*, who in turn divert some of this wealth to indulge their indolent and hedonist student lovers. Superficially, the *nyai* are in control of the situation, from what they wear, where they are seen, whom they choose to entertain to the manipulation of marriages and other assignments.

By comparison with *Tjerita Nyai Dasima* (published only 15 years earlier), and the uncomplicated, monogamous *nyai* figures of the 1930s plantation literature Tirto's stories describe a manipulative and sophisticated game at the expense of the colonizers.

Coté (1998) interprets "Cerita Nyai Ratna" as the progress of a modern woman seeking alternatives to a traditional polygamous marriage. However, it is obvious that both Ratna and Ningrum have aspirations to be wives of aristocrats and professional men. For the medical students, consorting with *nyai* is a bachelor pastime, not to be taken too seriously, whereas the *nyai* have hopes of snaring a future doctor as a husband. Busono, for example, keeps company with Ningrum because he finds her intelligence and knowledge useful, but has no intention of marrying her; meanwhile, he is engaged to a 'suitable' girl, unpretentious, modest and from a good family. Ratna's story, after her early relationship with Sambodo, is clearly one of progressive moral decline and callous self-interest, while Ningrum shows obvious disappointment at finding Busono is committed to another. The men in both stories (particularly Busono) are more traditional than the women, choosing to marry 'respectable' women who can support them in their careers, rather than damaging their reputations by making a commitment to a *nyai*, however modern, sophisticated and intelligent.

The dress of *nyai*, apparently the height of fashion, is described in considerable detail on several occasions, as is the costume of the medical student Sambodo. Both *nyai* and students are fashion plates and dandies, dressed to be seen and to attract attention. Ningrum, for example, dresses carefully depending on the impression she wishes to make:

⁴² Ratna's European partners are: first, a ship's captain, and then an elderly money-lender whom she poisons for his money. Eventually she is married to a lawyer. Sitti Ningrum is attached to a doctor.

Siti Ningrum went to her room to get dressed. Would she put on the usual silk blouse decorated with lace, and her slippers and white socks? No, not tonight! She would wear only a simple pink *kebaya* and a traditional Yogya style *kain*, with velvet sandals. She would wear her hair in a coil like a noble married woman or *raden ayu*. She also selected brooches and bracelets which were small and delicate, so as not to appear too ostentatious. Her earrings were without diamonds. In short, she was very simply dressed. (Busono: 102 / Sang Pemula: 377) ⁴³

It is a decadent world, full of deceit and lack of respect, especially for the Dutch, who, while they are regarded as being a better investment,⁴⁴ are dismissed as being from another race, therefore unworthy of consideration.⁴⁵ There is a blatant double standard; Busono keeps his options open, waiting for the most advantageous marriage partner, but also delivers a paternalistic lecture to Ningrum on her way of life, and offers to intercede for her with her doctor, so she can be released from her demeaning position. Busono's most overt moralizing points out that the behaviour of the *priyayi* does not differ much from that of the Dutch. This is the only explicit statement I have found by an Indonesian writer that critically compares the status of *nyai* and *selir*:

"As long as my people still like keeping *selir*, or do not want to get legally married before the woman is pregnant, as long as there are still illegitimate children amongst our nobility, as long as there are children of the Sunan who are rejected as mosque leaders, as long as all this is still happening, it is not fair for people to look down on the *nyais* who serve the Dutch or other foreigners. Their children can still get a proper education, a good position, and can work well, and in status they are no less than the illegal children of the aristocrats, who can become high ranking officials or *raden ayu*." (Busono: 112 / Sang Pemula: 386) ⁴⁶

⁴³ Siti Ningrum segera masuk ke dalam dan berhias. Kali ini tak seperti biasanya, berbaju sutera dikembang rendang, bersepatu pantofel dan berkaos putih. Tidak. Malam ini tidak! Ia hanya berpakaian sederhana, baju kebaya merah jambu, model biasa, kain ngengrengan Yogya, dengan selop beledu dan bergelung konde seperti raden-ayu. Peniti dan gelang emas pun serba tipis dan kecil, jadi tak begitu mengkilat. Giwangnya tanpa berlian. Pendek kata ia hanya berpakaian bersahaja.

⁴⁴ See "Cerita Nyai Ratna": 51. (Ratna's aunt) was rich because she had been a Dutch *nyai*, and so she had accumulated several plots of rice field, buffaloes, jewellery and a house. When her master died, she had enough to live on for the rest of her life.

⁴⁵ Cerita Nyai Ratna: 58, "Who cares about him? (the ship's captain) He's of a different race. Who knows, he probably already has a *nyonya*."

⁴⁶ Selama bangsa saya sendiri masih suka memelihara selir atau belum mau menikahi, jika belum bunting, selama di antara bangsawan-bangsawan masih banyak yang anak jadah, selama ada anak Sunan yang ditolak menjadi imam, selama masih ada segala ini tak adillah kalau orang masih menghina nyai-nyai, yang menghambakan diri pada orang Belanda atau bangsa lain. Toh anak mereka sempat mendapat pelajaran baik, berkedudukan baik, dan bisa bekerja dengan baik, tapi tak beda dari anak jadah bangsawan, yang bisa jadi bupati atau raden ayu.

DUTCH INDIES LITERATURE

Dutch belles-letters by women writers that foreground the *nyai* have often been dismissed as 'boarding school literature' and outside the established canon. E.M. Beekman, for example, does not discuss them in his extensive overview of Dutch colonial literature (1996).⁴⁷ Taylor (1977: 27) describes these writers as:

...crusaders whose sympathies are engaged for the Indonesian and part-Indonesian, perceived as victims of the author's own class and kind... The constant themes of these novels are the problems posed by concubinage; the relationship between immigrant bride and her husband's children from previous alliances with Indonesian women; tensions between legitimate and illegitimate children of a white father... ⁴⁸

Although in Taylor's opinion, while these works do not have the breadth of either Madelon Lulofs or P.A. Daum and Louis Couperus, their intimate portrayal of the domestic milieu permitted them to reveal sympathetically the condition of the Indonesian mistress or *nyai*, without the racist stereotypes of the male novelists, especially in regard to Eurasians. 'In so doing, they created a new stereotype in the eternally faithful, greatly wronged housekeeper.' (Taylor 1977: 30)

The novels by Madelon Lulofs (*Rubber*, 1931; *Coolie*, 1932) and her husband Laszlo Szekely (*Tropic Fever*, 1935) that I have chosen for analysis are set in a well-defined social, historical and geographical milieu: the plantation society of Sumatra's east coast during the first three decades of the twentieth century. According to Clerkx & Wertheim (1991: 81) the extensive accounts of concubinage in both *Rubber* and *Coolie* are the richest source by far on this subject amongst the plantation literature of Deli. Clerkx & Wertheim have analyzed all three novels, as well as others of the genre, and where appropriate I draw on their work to support my own analysis.

Laszlo Szekely⁴⁹ was born about 1880 into a landed family of Hungarian gentry. Apparently he lived as a planter in Sumatra from about 1902 to 1918, and then returned to Hungary, where he wrote *Tropic Fever*, published during the 1920s in Budapest.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Neither Lulofs nor Szekely is included in Beekman (1996). Nieuwenhuys (1982) devoted some space to Lulofs but says very little about Szekely.

⁴⁸ See Taylor 1977 for an extensive discussion of the content and themes of these novels by Dutch women writers.

⁴⁹ Biographical and other information on Szekely is taken from Anthony Reid's preface to *Tropic Fever* (1984). See also Clerkx & Wertheim (1991).

Madelon Hermina Lulofs⁵¹ (1899 – 1958) is probably a better-known writer than her husband. Born in Surabaya, she was the daughter of a colonial official, spending the first thirty years of her life, apart from brief trips to Holland, in the Indies. At the age of nineteen, she married a rubber planter ‘with no literary interests’ and accompanied him to East Sumatra. Szekely returned to Sumatra after the war, and scandalized European society by an affair with Lulofs, who divorced her husband and married Szekely in 1930. The couple was forced by the scandal to leave Sumatra and return to Europe, where Lulofs began her career as a writer.

Lulofs wrote three novels and a collection of short stories dealing with Sumatra’s plantation culture between 1931 and 1936, as well as reworking and translating her husband’s first novel into Dutch (1935).⁵² Szekely himself wrote two novels on the subject, but only the first (*Tropic Fever*) is available in English translation.⁵³

Tropic Fever describes the life of a young Hungarian working on the plantations of Deli during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The novel spans about 10 years, (ca. 1908 – 1918) from the protagonist’s arrival as a novice (*singkeh*) in the tobacco plantations to his elevation to the position of estate manager of a new rubber plantation, just after the First World War. The rough bachelor environment in *Tropic Fever* is complemented by the presence of housekeeper-concubines, or *nyai*, and the reader learns about two in particular, Sarinah, who lives with the Dutch plantation Assistant Dirk Dwars, and Kartinah, who is assigned to the narrator. European women are rare; usually the wives of plantation managers or senior colonial civil servants.

Rubber, set in the post-war milieu of Sumatra’s rubber estates and ending with the Wall Street crash of the 1930s, could be seen as a chronological sequel to *Tropic Fever*. The

⁵⁰ According to Reid, the novel ‘appears to have been so little noticed that copies of the Hungarian edition have been impossible to trace.’ It was not until the 1930s that the novel began to reach a wider public, when it was translated into Italian and German. In 1935 the Dutch translation, reworked from the German edition by Lulofs, followed.

⁵¹ Biographical information on Madelon Lulofs is taken from Anthony Reid’s foreword to *Coolie* (1987) and Rob Nieuwenhuys, *Mirror of the Indies*, 1982. See Nieuwenhuys for other references to the controversy in the Dutch colonial press (*De Courant*) about the novels. For additional information see Clerkx & Wertheim, 1991.

⁵² Lulofs’ first two novels *Rubber* and *Koelie* are available in English (*Rubber*, 1931 and *Coolie*, 1932), as is *Der Andere Wereld* (*The Other World*, 1934). *Emigranten* (*Emigrants*, a collection of short stories, 1933) is not available in English translation.

⁵³ Szekely’s second novel, in Hungarian, had run to a second edition by 1942, was rewritten in Dutch by Madelon Lulofs and published as *Rimboe* (*Jungle*) in 1949. According to Reid (Szekely 1984: xiii) it lacks the immediacy of his first book.

marriage ban for European plantation employees has been lifted, and women are now common in estate society. The *nyai* in the novel are Kiku-San, the Japanese housekeeper of John Vanlaer, the assistant on the plantation of a big American rubber firm, and Poppy, the Sundanese companion of the plantation overseer Jan Meesters.

Coolie is an attempt to visualize the world of the plantations of Deli from the point of view and psychology of the Indonesian worker, Ruki, a young buffalo herd from West Java who becomes a contract labourer on the plantations of Sumatra, and therefore is a counterpoint perspective to the two novels previously mentioned. Karminah, who Ruki befriends on the voyage to Sumatra, is taken as a *nyai* by a plantation manager, Tuan Dunk.

Rites of Passage

Where it is possible to establish an origin for the *nyai*, she is from outside Sumatra, and has come to the plantation as a coolie. For example, Karminah, a young Sundanese woman from Buitenzorg (Bogor) meets Ruki in a holding shed in Batavia before travelling by train and ship to Sumatra. She tells Ruki that she has been sold by her brother because of family poverty, ostensibly to a man who has promised to marry her; instead the man resold her to a recruiting agent in Batavia.

Sarinah (*Tropic Fever*) relates her own history as follows, encapsulating much of what sociologists have written as typical of the *nyai*'s living conditions and expectations⁵⁴.

The first white gentleman with whom she had served was drunk every night and beat her terribly. Once, when she was pregnant, he had driven her away. Then she had gone to a *dukun* ⁵⁵ who rid her of the child with medicine and prayers. But the tuan would not have her back. He took another nyay into his house. Sarinah went to another nyay and was her guest for two days. But then the tuan of this nyay gave her to a singkeh (novice). The new master was still quite young and did not even speak Malay... She had to eat with him at table! ... Incredible! ... But the ignorant singkeh was a very good master. He did not drink, did not beat her and gave her much money. (TF: 214 – 215)

This arrangement comes to an end when Sarinah's Tuan receives a letter from Europe: 'There was a photo too, in the letter: the picture of a very tall white woman ... And the following day he sent Sarinah away.' (TF: 215) After some time in the kampong, Sarinah is assigned to Dwars, with whom she had lived for three years:

⁵⁴ Quotations are cited from Szekely, *Tropic Fever* and Lulofs, *Rubber*; *Coolie*, henceforth abbreviated as TF, Rubber (and) Coolie.

⁵⁵ Native healer, sometimes an expert in the arts of black magic as well.

Tuan Dwars was a good master. It is true that he was sometimes drunk, but then all the tuans are that. She did not have to work much. Tuan Dwars paid well, and yet... one was still only the wife of an unclean *kafir*.... And still, she was just an outcast from her own race. It is true, they were afraid of her, as of the tuan himself, but she was equally hated and despised. (TF: 216)

The life of a *nyai* in the plantations, as depicted in the novels of Szekely and Lulofs, had definite rites of passage and rules. The extent to which these codes were adhered to depended largely on negotiations between the two protagonists: Tuan and *Nyai*. Needless to say, it was usually the European who controlled the situation and set the tenor of the relationship.

The first rite of passage is the transfer of sexual / domestic rights. The *nyai* has no choice about whether she is assigned to a male coolie or appropriated by a European plantation manager. Previous relationships have no validity, as Ruki finds when he tries to protect Karminah. Both Kartinah (*Tropic Fever*) and Karminah (*Coolie*) change hands from a Javanese to a European for ten guilders.

Dwars, observing the untidy and dirty state of the young Hungarian's house, summons an old coolie, Pardi, and his young 'wife' Kartinah. Money changes hands, and Kartinah is transferred to the singkeh, together with the following advice:

A man cannot live without a woman... One can't bring a white woman out here, at least we little tuans may not do so. In the first place our contract forbids it. And secondly, we can't keep a European woman on our salary, at least not one that is at all respectable. So there's nothing left for us but to take a black woman. And you'll see, they aren't so bad. One must just train them well. (TF: 157)

The narrator's initial reaction is revulsion towards what he calls this 'vulgar traffic in human flesh... we didn't even ask the woman, but just purchased her like a cow. For ten silver guilders.' (TF: 158) However, by the end of the evening, he has got used to the idea, although the woman's passive acquiescence to the situation makes him uncomfortable. The idea that she might have a choice in the matter seems alien to Kartinah, who has 'followed' Pardi as a contract wife, and now will 'follow' the Tuan as a *nyai*. Throughout *Tropic Fever* the *nyai* Kartinah does not have a voice.

In *Coolie*, the women who have newly arrived are allotted to coolies who have served for a long time on the plantation: Karminah to an old Javanese named Marto. In a short time, Karminah catches the eye of Tuan Dunk, the European assistant manager on the plantation. There is a detailed account of her transfer from Marto to Tuan Dunk, for the same price as Kartinah is passed to the Hungarian in *Tropic Fever*: ten guilders.

The second rite of passage is sleeping with the Tuan, after which full *Nyai* status has been achieved. In *Tropic Fever*, the details of the sexual encounter and the woman's feelings are passed over. She is merely a statuesque and compliant embodiment of white male fantasies.

'Returning to my bedroom, I found the Batik sarong and the white bodice lying on the floor. I opened the mosquito-netting. Like a warm, living statue cast in bronze, Kartinah lay on the white sheet.' (TF: 161)

Within a day, the change in Kartinah's status is obvious.

'Tabeh, nyay, here's the hot water for shaving.' Nyay? Amat's tongue had quickly accustomed itself to this respectful mode of address. But yesterday the woman was an orang-contract, a despised pariah. For one night she had slept with the tuan, and already she was a nyay... (TF: 162)

In *Coolie*, there is a detailed description of the encounter from Karminah's point of view; in particular her fear and distaste at the thought of having to sleep with a white man whose breath smells of alcohol and whose body odour resembles that of a corpse. (Coolie: 101)

Tuan Dunk (who has dismissed his previous *nyai* of four years because she has become pregnant) sends Karminah off to wash her hair because he cannot stand the smell of coconut oil. This increases Karminah's terror, until finally she crouches, trembling, in a corner of his bedroom. (Coolie: 102) This episode focuses on the sexual domination of a small, fearful, submissive Asian woman who has no choice in the matter.

The third rite of passage is the wearing of identifying clothing: described by Taylor (1985) as a white *kebaya* and slippers, 'symbolising her new status and passage from the Indonesian to the halfway world of a bachelor-centred Indies society'. In *Tropic Fever*, the narrator simply tells Kartinah: 'For this slip of paper here you can get twenty-five guilders from the Chinaman in the store and you can buy what you want for yourself. See to it that you look as a real nyay should.' (TF: 167)

Lulofs is much more explicit about the appearance and clothing of a *nyai*. Karminah has gained in confidence after some time of cohabiting with Dunk, and from her dress and demeanour, is now a full-blown *nyai*.

Ruki contemplated her stealthily. She had grown fatter. She wore a white jacket with lace. Four large English sovereigns held it together. A gold pin gleamed in her hair, and she walked in slippers, not barefooted... (Coolie: 155)

Not all *nyai* were from Java or wore the costume described above. In *Rubber*, there is a description of a Japanese *nyai*, who wears kimonos and Japanese sandals, and wears her hair in the Japanese style.

She was like a porcelain doll, always scrupulously clean, with her long hair put up in three neat buns and a swathe. How orderly and clean and economical Kiku San had been! (...) She had been the ideal woman, always submissive, willing and devoted. She had but one aim – to take care of everything that was his with a devotion almost incomprehensible to a man from the West. (Rubber: 19-20)

Another (and usually final) ritual is the abandoning or paying off of a *nyai* when the Tuan moves on or finds a suitable marriage partner. All three novels contain instances of this.

In *Tropic Fever*, when the Hungarian narrator is ordered to go to a new land concession, he decides to take his male servant Amat, but not Kartinah. After his friend Dwars departs for Europe, he feels homesick for European company and the limitations of his relationship with Kartinah become all too apparent, even though he has by this time a good command of the Malay language.

I won't take Kartinah along, I'll dismiss her, I am sick of her anyway.... And yet my departure was harder for me than I had imagined. Three years in this solitude was a long time, and we had got used to each other. To live with a woman for three years and then simply chase her away, from one day to the next, was no child's play. Whichever way I looked at it, she had after all been my wife for three years. And that means so much in the wilds. (TF: 310)

Kartinah has become more attached, and has more to lose than her Tuan.

(She) rolled about on the floor, howled, tore her hair, was actually possessed of the devil... She tied the two hundred guilders compensation money in a handkerchief, put the clothes I needed for my trip in proper order, and packed my things. When I climbed into the carriage, the devil started to afflict her again, but I quickly drove off. (TF: 311)

His companions scoffed at him, saying that 'a black woman was never attached to a white man. And even if she was devoted to you? What of it? You've paid her, and that settles the business.' (TF: 311)

In this way, the narrator is encouraged to trivialize the experience, to suppress his feelings of guilt and to dismiss Kartinah's distress as a 'tinkah' (whim). Not only is the payment of compensation money meant to suggest that the 'native' has no feelings, but that the arrangement has been strictly a commercial one on both sides.

In *Rubber*, Kiku San the Japanese *nyai* is also dismissed with a payment, this time of two thousand guilders, but her reactions to the situation are much more controlled.

"I'm going to be married, Kiku San."

She lowered her eyes and again made her little curtsey. Her face remained an impenetrable mask. But from her eyes the question had gone. Her shoulders were expressive of submission and readiness.

"I've put two thousand guilders in the bank for you, Kiku San." She bowed and muttered her thanks.

"Here is the document." He handed her a paper which she took and folded up. It pained him that she should take it all so calmly. How beastly all this was, he thought. How beastly and disgusting towards a woman who was a good woman.

... When John closed the door behind her, an indefinite feeling mastered him. Was it melancholy? Gratitude? Perhaps only gratitude. She had been his wife for five years, had cared for him and served him with greater fidelity and more sense of duty than a European would ever show to him. (*Rubber*: 21)

Whether the *nyai* is evicted because a European wife will replace them, because of an unwanted pregnancy or as the result of boredom, they have no control over the situation. Marriage has never been a serious possibility for their European masters. In all three novels, there is little evidence of a positive outcome for the plantation *nyai*. Either they have their children taken from them, are discarded, or are passed on from European to European, like a household chattel. However, there are exceptions: Poppy in *Rubber* and Karminah in *Coolie*.

The relationship between the plantation overseer Jan Meesters and his Sundanese housekeeper Poppy is based on genuine affection and companionship on both sides. It is one of the few, if not the only, interracial union in these plantation novels that is an enduring one, perhaps because of Poppy's assertiveness. Marian Versteegh (the wife of a plantation manager) barely conceals her distaste, and hints that there has been a transgression of propriety. Perhaps, she concedes, Poppy is preferable to the type of Dutch woman that Meesters might have chosen! However, later in the novel Meesters makes it clear that when he goes home to Holland, he will take Poppy with him.

(Poppy was) past her prime, and found compensation for her discomforts by holding him mercilessly under her thumb. She felt herself a wife, and had long ago given up the idea that she could ever be displaced by another woman. When Meesters visited one of his colleagues or when he took his annual fortnight off, she went with him as a matter of course. She invited other native women to see her without asking his permission, and she managed his money affairs... With his work and his beer, she formed Meesters's horizon. (Rubber: 24)

After many years with Tuan Dunk, Karminah marries a tailor, and owns a small, neat house and a food stall in a neighbouring village. She has profited by her relationship with the Tuan, even if he has taken her two daughters with him to Holland. (Coolie: 198-201). She keeps mementoes of her life with the Tuan, and seems resigned to the fact that her children will have a better future with him in Holland than in the plantations of the Indies.

In general, there is very little real communication between Tuan and *nyai* in the novels discussed above and I must concur with Locher-Scholten (1992) that 'the *nyai*'s potential role as mediator between the two cultures was almost negligible'. Locher-Scholten suggests that the generally contemptuous attitude towards Asians and a lack of interest by Europeans in the indigenous culture contributed to this, especially in the frontier society of Deli, where both workers and managers were far removed from their respective homes.

These limitations are expressed poignantly in *Tropic Fever* as follows:

'East is east, and west is west, and never the twain shall meet.' Kartinah cooked and washed for me, looked after the house and slept with me, and yet she was as little related to me as a coconut palm is to an acacia. What I considered good, was bodok (sic) to her – stupid. What I considered beautiful; was ugly to her... What was gratitude in my eyes she could not understand; she could not even express it in words because in her mother

tongue there was no expression for it. We would sit side by side and yet know nothing of one another. (TF: 221)

Social space, silence and a campaign of slander

When extracts from *Tropic Fever* began to appear in *Harper's Magazine* at the end of 1936, a member of the Volkstraad (the colonial legislature in the Indies) asked the Dutch Government to put an end to this 'campaign of slander' by prohibiting 'offences against the dignity of the state'. Following statements by the conservative Indies press that the Szekelys' writings had 'dragged European society through the mud' (Clerkx & Wertheim 1991: 3) there was a literary backlash by the Dutch male planter community, several of whom wrote 'counter-novels' intended to correct the 'distorted picture' drawn by lady writers (such as Jo Manders and Madelon Lulofs) that presented the behaviour of planters in a less than flattering light. Both *Coolie* and *Tropic Fever* were published in English translation in 1937. It is likely that the open revelation of sexual mores on the Deli plantations was more embarrassing to Holland than the exposure of the exploitation of coolies by the contract system and penal sanctions, which had been abolished by the Dutch Government in 1931. By exploring planter-*nyai* relationships in such depth Szekely and Lulofs had transgressed an unwritten colonial law, that is, of 'keeping silence' and keeping the *nyai* behind closed doors.

The Hungarian narrator in *Tropic Fever* refers to the *nyai*'s 'invisibility' and the existence of social and spatial codes:

... Sarinah was first a contract coolie wife, but soon became a nyay. After serving as nyay with several tuans, she again worked as a coolie wife, until Dwars took her to his home. Since then she had cooked and washed for him and slept with him. But as soon as a guest entered the house, she modestly vanished to the annexes. For that was prescribed by the adat. The white tuan may keep a nyay, but officially nothing is known about it. That... would shock the few white women who were out there. For a man's prestige, too, it was desirable to keep silence on that score, for a white man may keep black servant girls, but not sleep with them in one bed. That was the tradition. (TF: 110)

According to Clerkx & Wertheim (1991) the male authors of the counter-novels do not shed much light on the topic of *nyai*; in fact they take pains to avoid it. For example, in the introduction to his novel *Deliplanter*, Kleian states: 'The native housekeeper... ought not to play an important role. Her presence must not be utilized in order to lend a certain piquancy to the story'. Kleian does not make his reasons clear for avoiding such a

controversial subject, 'which is surprising because the writer wants his book to "bear testimony to the realities of Delian planters' life"'. (Clerkx & Wertheim 1991: 81)

It is worth noting here a much earlier literary exception to the rule of silence: P.A. Daum's novel *Ups and Downs of Life in the Indies*, first published in 1892 and set on the plantations of Java.⁵⁶ A businessman and financier, Twissels, has a Eurasian *nyai*, and allows her to remain present, on his veranda, even when European guests are present. Because of his wealth and connections, Twissels is able to transgress the social restrictions about cultural space occupied by the *nyai*.

Everyone knew that Twissels, who was not married, had a young Indo-European girl as a "housekeeper". That by itself wasn't so bad, but he wasn't bothered about having the girl sit with him on the front veranda, where she served him his tea in the afternoon. Yes, it was even known that he permitted himself to invite Louisa for a chat with the men at night while they were playing cards at his house. But, of course, he had to have had one too many then.

People had warned him in private. If he had been without means or influence, the matter wouldn't have ended with warnings. He would have been ostracized. But one couldn't do that to a wealthy and well-connected merchant whom everybody would need at some time in the future. Thus he placed himself squarely above the law of social behaviour.

(Daum 1999: 113)

The failure of the Deli counter-novels to deal with concubinage is clear proof that these writers wished to downplay the *nyai* phenomenon so extensively revealed in Szekely's and Lulofs' novels, no doubt to protect 'White Prestige' while retaining the covert privileges of sexual and racial dominance in Indies society. The *nyai* provided all the services of a wife, without the inconvenience of legal ties. The Szekelys had brought the *nyai* out of the annexes and on to the veranda, which offended Dutch bourgeois sensibilities and raised fears of moral and racial degeneracy.

Nyai Ontosoroh: Resistance

Everything formed a network like that of a spider's web. And in the middle of the network were the concubines and *nyais*... They aren't employers even though they live in the same room as their masters. They are not included in the same class as the children they themselves have borne. They are not Pure, not Indo, and can even be said not to be Native. They are secret mountains. *Awakenings* 1991: 223 / *Bumi Manusia* 1980: 285)

⁵⁶ For information on the Indies novels of P.A. Daum, see E.M. Beekman's introduction to *Ups and Downs of Life in the Indies*, 1999: 1 - 47

Although there is evidence of many works dealing with concubinage in the earlier part of the twentieth century (Hellwig 1992, Hunter 2002 and Côté 1998 all suggest that there was a 'genre' of *nyai* literature), after Independence, Indonesian writers were conspicuously silent on this subject until the appearance of Nyai Ontosoroh, the subaltern heroine of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's tetralogy the 'Buru Quartet'.⁵⁷ In his 2002 essay Goenawan Mohamad positions Nyai Ontosoroh, not only as a heroic woman but also as a metaphor for the emerging Indonesian nation:

She is not the kind of indigenous woman found in typical Javanese surroundings at the beginning of this century. Nevertheless, her story is the story of Indonesia, which is about the struggle to overcome various kinds of domination in a particular colonial space: the race-based hierarchy imposed by the whites, the ancient familial patriarchy of the Javanese and the ideology of submission of the lower orders. (Mohamad 2002: 184)

In this chapter, I analyze the narrative of Sanikem / Nyai Ontosoroh as it unfolds in the novels of the Buru Quartet, and draw conclusions about how one of the most admired female protagonists of Indonesian fiction takes control of her life.

Nyai Ontosoroh's story is narrated at third hand by Minke, who hears it from her daughter Annelies. Unlike the coastal villagers of *Gadis Pantai*, Sanikem's family is enmeshed with the interests of the colonial plantation hierarchy. Whereas the parents of *Gadis Pantai* are under the misguided assumption that their daughter will improve her lot by marrying the Bendoro, the father of Sanikem is motivated by personal ambitions within the sugar plantation where he works as a clerk.

He dreamed of becoming paymaster: cashier, holder of the cash of the Tulangan sugar factory, in Sidoarjo... As paymaster he would be a big man in Tulangan. Merchants would bow down in respect. The Pure and Mixed-Blood *tuans* would greet him in Malay. The stroke of his pen meant money! He would be counted among the powerful in the factory. (Awakenings: 53 / Bumi Manusia: 72) ⁵⁸

⁵⁷ The English translations of Pramoedya's texts in this section are by Max Lane, quoted from *Awakenings* (Penguin, 1991) a compendium volume that combines Pramoedya's first two novels of the Buru Quartet (*This Earth of Mankind* and *Child of All Nations*); and *House of Glass* (1992). The Indonesian texts are from *Bumi Manusia* (1980), and *Rumah Kaca* (1988). Page references to the original Indonesian text are indicated as Bumi Manusia and Rumah Kaca.

⁵⁸ Jabatan yang diimpikannya adalah jurubayar: kassier, pemegang kas pabrik gula Tulangan, Sidoarjo... Sebagai jurubayar pabrik ia akan menjadi orang besar di Tulangan. Pedagang akan membungkuk menghormati. Tuan-tuan Totok dan Peranakan akan memberi tabik dalam Melayu. Guratan penanya berarti uang! Ia akan termasuk golongan berkuasa dalam pabrik.

After ten years of diligence, fawning, resorting to ascetic practices and even black magic, he has still not achieved his ambition and has become an embarrassment to his family and the laughing stock of his village. Sastrotomo then offers his own daughter, the fourteen-year-old Sanikem, to the plantation administrator, Herman Mellema. That this has been premeditated is obvious from the fact that Sanikem, in spite of her beauty, is regarded as something of an old maid and that previous proposals of marriage have been rejected. Like Gadis Pantai, she has no choice in the matter and nor does her mother; it is her father who determines everything.

Three days after Mellema has paid a visit to Sastrotomo's house to view his prospective mistress, Sanikem is ordered to pack her belongings, and taken by her parents to Mellema's house. Her mother protests, but her father has no hesitation in the matter. She is being expelled from her home.

Truly, Ann, I was ashamed to have as a father, Sastrotomo, the clerk. He was not fit to be my father. But I was still his daughter, and there was nothing I could do. Neither the tears nor the tongue of my mother could prevent the disaster. Let alone I, who neither understood nor owned this world. I did not even possess my own body. (Awakenings: 56 / Bumi Manusia: 76) ⁵⁹

Sanikem witnesses the transaction that takes place; she is betrayed by her father, sold for 25 guilders 'like an animal' and a promise that Sastrotomo will be made paymaster after a two-year trial period. She tells her daughter:

'So, Ann, that was the simple ritual whereby a child was sold by her own father, clerk Sastrotomo. And who was it who was sold: I, myself, Sanikem. From that moment on I lost all respect and esteem for my father – for anyone who has ever sold their own children. For whatever purpose or reason.' (Awakenings: 57 / Bumi Manusia: 77). ⁶⁰

The following day, after her parents leave, is familiar from the accounts in novels by Dutch authors. There is Sanikem's ritual bathing and hair washing (in this case carried out by Tuan Mellema, who treats her as a sort of doll) and at night, the consummation, with

⁵⁹ Sungguh, Ann, aku malu mempunyai seorang ayah jurutulis Sastrotomo. Dia tidak patut jadi ayahku. Tapi aku masih anaknya, dan aku tidak bisa berbuat sesuatu. Air mata dan lidah Ibu tak mampu jadi penolak bala. Apalagi aku yang tak tahu dan tak memiliki dunia ini. Badan sendiri pun bukan aku punya.

⁶⁰ Begitulah, Ann, upacara sederhana bagaimana seorang anak telah dijual oleh ayahnya sendiri, jurutulis Sastrotomo. Yang dijual adalah diriku: Sanikem. Sejak detik itu hilang sama sekali penghargaan dan hormatku pada ayahku; pada siapa saja yang dalam hidupnya pernah menjual anaknya sendiri. Untuk tujuan dan maksud apa pun.

Sanikem passive and paralyzed by terror. This is the ritual that transforms the village girl to a *nyai*, and wipes out her past as Sanikem. As *Nyai* tells her daughter:

That night Tuan came. I heard the steps of his shoes as he came nearer. He came straight into the room. I shuddered. The lamp, which the servants had lit earlier in the evening, threw the light onto his clothes, all white and dazzling. He came up to me. He picked up my body from the floor, put it on the bed, and laid it down there. It seemed I dared not even breathe, afraid that I might enrage him. I don't know how long that mountain of flesh was with me... As soon as I regained consciousness, I knew I was no longer the Sanikem of the previous day. I'd become a real *nyai*.... And the name Sanikem disappeared forever. (Awakenings: 59 / Bumi Manusia: 79) ⁶¹

From that day on *Nyai Ontosoroh* rejects her past, refuses to see her family and resolves to embrace her new position. Her motivation is to revenge herself upon her parents. 'I had to prove to them, that whatever they had done to me, I would be more worthy of respect than them, even if only as a *nyai*.' (Awakenings: 60 / Bumi Manusia / 80) ⁶²

However, she has no illusions about the nature of the *nyai* position, and if she endeavours to excel it is with the clear-sighted expectation that she will one day have to be independent, and she must gather her resources, both intellectual and material to guard against that day.

Life as a *nyai* is very, very difficult. A *nyai* is just a bought slave, whose duty is only to satisfy her master. In everything! Then, on the other hand, she has to be ready at any moment for the possibility that her master, her *tuan*, will become bored with her. And she may be kicked out with all her children, her own children, unhonoured by Native society because they were born outside wedlock. (Awakenings: 59 / Bumi Manusia: 80)

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⁶¹ Pada malam hari Tuan datang. Kudengar langkah sepatunya makin dekat. Ia langsung masuk ke dalam kamar. Aku gemetar. Lampu, yang tadi sore, dinyalakan oleh bujang, memantulkan cahaya pada pakaiannya yang serba putih dan mengkilaukan. Ia dekati aku. Diangkatnya badanku dari lantai, diletakkannya di ranjang dan digolekkannya di atasnya. Bernafas pun rasanya aku tak berani, takut menggusarkannya. Aku tak tahu sampai berapa lama bukit daging itu berada denganku... Begitu aku siuman kembali, kuketahui aku bukan si Sanikem yang kemarin. Aku telah jadi nyai yang sesungguhnya... Dan nama Sanikem hilang untuk selama-lamanya.

⁶² Akan kubuktikan pada mereka, apapun yang telah diperbuat atas diriku, aku harus bisa lebih berharga daripada mereka, sekalipun hanya sebagai nyai.

⁶³ Hidup sebagai nyai terlalu sulit. Dia cuma seorang budak belian yang kewajibannya hanya memuaskan tuannya. Dalam segala hal! Sebaliknya setiap waktu orang harus bersiap-siap terhadap kemungkinan tuannya sudah merasa bosan. Salah-salah bisa badan diusir dengan semua anak, anak sendiri, yang tidak dihargai oleh umum Pribumi karena dilahirkan tanpa perkawinan syah.

This is a prescient statement, because Nyai Ontosoroh does, in fact, lose everything: her daughter Annelies, her son Robert, and finally her property, appropriated by Mellema's vengeful son Maurits, from his legal marriage in Holland.

Tineke Hellwig (1994) devotes one chapter to *Gadis Pantai* and *Bumi Manusia*, the first novel of Pramoedya's *Buru Quartet*. She has chosen *Gadis Pantai* and *Bumi Manusia* as a convenient comparison because they are both set in the early twentieth century, at the time of the ethical period of Dutch government of the Netherlands East Indies. They also are convenient contrasts because *Gadis Pantai* deals solely with the Javanese milieu, and class and gender conflicts in the Javanese world, whereas *Bumi Manusia* introduces interaction and conflicts with the Dutch colonial world on the estates of East Java.

Hellwig concludes that both *Gadis Pantai* and Nyai Ontosoroh are victims of what she calls 'woman stealing' (the appropriation of women by men), one by a *priyayi* Javanese, and the other by a Dutch colonial master. I have already discussed this woman stealing in *Gadis Pantai* – the Girl from the Coast is stolen from her parents under the pretext of an arranged marriage to a noble; her own daughter is stolen from her when she is forcibly removed from the Bendoro's house. Similarly, Sanikem / Nyai Ontosoroh is removed from her family at the age of fourteen to become the concubine of a Dutch sugar estate manager.

Hellwig does not see victory for either character; *Gadis Pantai* leads a life of hardship and poverty while Nyai Ontosoroh, after being forced to live with a Dutchman, loses her only daughter to Herman Mellema's family after his death. Annelies is practically kidnapped from her mother and husband and taken to Holland, where she pines away and dies soon after. However, not only does Nyai prosper in business, establishing another dairy business near Surabaya after the eviction from her dairy farm at Wonokromo, she eventually marries the adventurer and painter Jean Marais, and returns with him to France.

My own comparison of the characters of *Gadis Pantai* and Nyai Ontosoroh suggests mixed outcomes: *Gadis Pantai*, living totally within the Javanese *priyayi* milieu, adapts to her environment, but does not acquire any knowledge that will assist her to survive in the outside world once she leaves the Bendoro's house. She becomes a marginal and marginalized character, both in the village, where she is regarded as a *priyayi*, and in Rembang, where because of her lowly status she is replaced by a more suitable wife as soon as she gives birth. She is not even permitted to be a mother, as her aristocratic husband

appropriates her rights to her own child. The narrative tells us that although she remarries, she never has another child. In a limited sense she makes the decision to retain her self-respect by living independently rather than returning to the coast as the failed wife of an aristocrat after she has been mythologized by her village.

So she chooses a peripatetic life, buying and selling second-hand goods, as she has learned no practical skills in the Bendoro's house that equip her to do anything else. Her triumph is that within limited possibilities, and despite her disappointments, she manages to survive.

Sanikem, however, because of the treachery of her father, knows that the door of return is closed to her, and resolves to make the best of her *nyai* situation. Her advantage lies in having a tolerant and supportive mentor, Mellema, who insists that she acquires the skills and sophistication that will allow her to survive in a modern world. Mohamad (2002) only briefly alludes to Mellema's role as mentor: but, importantly, it is Mellema who teaches her European manners, how to speak Dutch, how to read and write; the skills that allow her to reinvent herself after the catastrophes that befall her in *This Earth of Mankind* and *Child of all Nations*. It is possible too, that Mellema, who is represented as of relatively high morals at the beginning of the story, has foreseen that he has a responsibility to equip his *nyai* not only to be a good companion, but to survive in a situation where he is no longer able to support her (Awakenings: 61). When Mellema loses his mind and becomes dissolute and syphilitic, living in a Chinese brothel (as does their son), she exerts the right to limit their entry to the house and to turn her back on Mellema as she has on her parents. She has both resistance and agency; she has been able to protect herself against degradation.

Perhaps the social vacuum occupied by the *nyai* (as is true also in the case of Gadis Pantai) gives her the freedom to move from one social situation to another, without the ties of village or family. The police spy Pangemanann observes that Nyai Ontosoroh is a strong-willed person who has 'given up nationality, homeland and village and who had chosen foreign citizenship and put it to use in no less effective a way that those who had been born citizens. She had chosen freedom for herself.' (House of Glass: 332 / Rumah Kaca: 352).⁶⁴ Both Gadis Pantai and Nyai Ontosoroh retain their self-respect and dignity, the former by remembering her origins, the latter by reinventing herself, but the options for the *nyai* are much broader because of her circumstances. The lives of an itinerant second-hand goods

⁶⁴ Inilah orang keras yang telah menyangkal kebangsaan, Tanah Air dan kampung halaman sendiri dan memilih kewarga-negaraan asing dan dapat menggunakannya, tak kalah dengan warga-negara yang asli. Ia telah memilih kebebasan untuk dirinya.

seller and the cultured wife of a French artist are worlds apart, perhaps indicating the diversity of outcomes for both *selir* and *nyai* depending on individual circumstances.

Tinung: Compliance

The central female protagonist in Remy Sylado's *Ca-bau-kan* (1999) is a young Javanese woman, Tinung, who, between periods as an 'entertainer' on riverboats, becomes the concubine of businessmen in the Chinese community in Java from about 1930 – 1960, as well as a *jugun ianfu* or comfort woman during the Japanese Occupation of the Indies. This novel is significant because it is probably the first work of literature with a dominant Chinese theme published after the demise of Soeharto's New Order regime (during which literary and other expressions of Chinese culture were suppressed). ⁶⁵

In the prologue to the novel, Tinung's granddaughter explains that in the Hok-Kian language, 'ca-bau-kan' simply means 'woman'. A second meaning in the Netherlands Indies was an indigenous woman who is the defacto wife of a Chinese. (Sylado 1999: 1). However, when Tinung is installed as mistress of the tobacco and opium trader, Tan Peng Liang, his sons use 'ca-bau-kan' as a derogatory term, referring to her role as a riverboat entertainer and prostitute. Thus, 'ca-bau-kan' is as elusive in meaning as 'nyai', that denoted 'both a respectable woman of middle age and the mistress or concubine of a European'. ⁶⁶

Tinung's history unfolds against a background of intrigue, corruption, and rivalry involving different factions of the Chinese business community in Batavia (Jakarta). At the age of fourteen, Tinung becomes the fifth wife of an elderly ship's captain. Five months later, he is drowned at sea, leaving Tinung a widow and four months pregnant. This is her first misfortune: 'And so she began her life of various sorrows, chapter by chapter, until she became a ca-bau-kan'. (Sylado 1999: 8) ⁶⁷

First, her mother-in-law throws her out of the house with only the clothes on her back. Unable to stand the gossip, Tinung shuts herself away in the house, until her mother suggests that instead of moping, she becomes a prostitute (*cabo*). Her aunt, Saodah, is her introduction to the world of prostitution on the boats of the River Jodo, the centre of nightlife in Jakarta.

⁶⁵ English translations are by the present writer. The page references are to the original Indonesian text, indicated by Sylado 1999

⁶⁶ Ming 1983: 71

⁶⁷ Dengannya dia memulai babak kehidupannya dengan pelbagai duka, sampai kelak dia menjadi ca-bau-kan.

Here, from the beginning, Chinese immigrants had been able to preserve their custom of looking for a partner, not to live with forever, but just for entertainment while enjoying classical Chinese songs sung by the prostitutes...

All the *ca-bau-kan* usually had managers, who provided them with opera –style costumes, made of silk with fine embroidery. They sat on boats hung with special Chinese lanterns, moving slowly down the river... On the boats the *ca-bau-kan* performed their roles, singing love songs in a refined Chinese dialect. It was true that there were some Chinese women among them who were fluent in this dialect, but many *ca-bau-kan* were indigenous Malay women who had been trained to sing Chinese songs without understanding the words they sang. (Sylado 1999: 15) ⁶⁸

Tinung, because of her youth and beauty, becomes popular on the River Jodo. After a while she attracts the attention of a Chinese moneylender from Bandung, Tan Peng Liang (I) ⁶⁹ who owns a banana plantation in Sewan. He becomes Tinung's patron, taking her to live on the plantation. Saodah handles the transaction; Tinung has no say in the matter.

Tinung glanced at Saodah, without saying anything. She was trying to comprehend the step that she would take in the future, a new experience that was shrouded in mystery. Whether it would be pleasant or unpleasant, was in the hands of fate! (Sylado 1999: 19)

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During her four months on the plantation, Tinung witnesses violence, torture, and the murder of one of the moneylender's debtors. She runs away twice. Her determination to escape is a kind of resistance; had she stayed, she would have been killed for witnessing the murder.

Now pregnant, Tinung returns to the River Jodo with Saodah. At a ceremony in a Chinese temple, she attracts the attention of Tan Peng Liang (II) a wealthy tobacco trader from

⁶⁸ Para *ca-bau-kan* itu umumnya dikelola oleh *tauke-tauke* dengan memberi mereka kostum model opera, berbahan sutera dengan warna-warni menyolok disertai bordir-bordir yang bermutu. Mereka berada di perahu-perahu yang dipasang lampion khas Tiongkok, bergerak pelan-pelan di kali itu... Di perahu-prahu itulah para *ca-bau-kan* menawarkan jasanya dengan menyanyikan lagu-lagu bersyair asmara dalam bahasa *Cia-Im*. Memang ada juga di antara perempuan-perempuan itu yang Tionghoa totok, dan bercakap *Cia-Im* dengan baik, tapi banyak *ca-bau-kan* asli pribumi yang telah terlatih dengan fasih menyanyikan lagu-lagu Tionghoa tanpa mengerti kata-kata yang dinyanyikannya itu.

⁶⁹ There are two characters with the name of Tan Peng Liang in Sylado's novel. To avoid confusion, I shall refer to the first, a moneylender from Bandung, as Tan Peng Liang (I). He also owns a banana plantation in Sewan. The second, Tan Peng Liang (II) is a tobacco and opium trader from Semarang.

⁷⁰ Tinung melirik kepada Saodah, tanpa berkata apa-apa. Agaknya dia mencoba mengerti, bahwa langkah berikut yang akan dilakukan kakinya di esok hari, adalah suatu pengalaman baru yang serba kabut. Menyenangkan atau menyakitkan, terserah nasib!

Semarang. Tinung's first night in Tan Peng Liang's house is a turning point, representing the cutting of her ties with the river Jodo. By her passivity, she is distinguishing clearly between one kind of sexual role and another.

When night came, Tinung, like most Indonesian women at that time, considered that taking off one's clothes, being stark naked, and lying with legs apart on the bed, for the satisfaction of a man, was something sinful. She must be silent, and not respond. Meaning, that during the act, Indonesian women at that time considered that they were fulfilling the requirements of womanhood, or perhaps servitude, so that when they were in that position, they were allowing themselves to be like a rice field or a plot of land that remained silent when it was hoed and ploughed before the rice was planted. Tinung too, on that first night in Gang Chaulan was no more than a lifeless statue. She was not a partner in lust here – it was as if she was cutting the ties of her history on the River Jodo, where people had nicknamed her "Si Chixiang". But Tan Peng Liang liked Tinung that way. (Sylado 1999: 83) ⁷¹

She moves in, with her child and Saodah, and is treated like a queen, 'with a gentleness that was almost unbelievable'. Within a short time she is pregnant.

During her pregnancy, Tinung visits Tan Peng Liang's family in Semarang and makes her entry to the Chinese community, through prayers and rituals in various Chinese temples.

It was totally different from what she knew of the Chinese during her time as a *ca-bau-kan* on the River Jodo. If she compared her situation with the time she was under the management of pimps, when she felt that she was just treated as a living object, now she felt that she had become a human being. This humanity was even more complete if she compared it with her situation as a widow after Bang Obar's death, carried away by a wave. (Sylado 1999: 91 - 92) ⁷²

⁷¹ Di malam harinya, Tinung, seperti kebanyakan perempuan Indonesia waktu itu, menganggap buka baju, telanjang bulat, dan mengangkang di ranjang, demi kepuasan lelaki, adalah fitrah. Dia mesti diam, tidak melakukan respon. Artinya, untuk perbuatan itu, perempuan-perempuan Indonesia waktu itu menganggap diri memenuhi syarat keibuan, yang dapat berarti juga kababuan, apabila dalam kedudukan itu, dia biarkan dirinya menjadi seperti sawah atau ladang yang melulu diam jika dipacul atau dibajak sebelum ditanami padi. Tinung pun hari pertama di Gang Chaulan itu ibarat patung yang tak bernyawa, tak lebih. Dia tidak jadi mitra birahi di sini—seakan putus tali sejarahnya dengan Kalijodo, di mana orang sempat menjulukinya Si Chixiang. Tapi Tan Peng Liang menyukai keberadaan Tinung kini.

⁷² Sama sekali ini berbeda dengan apa yang pernah diketahuinya tentang Tionghoa selama ia menjadi *ca-bau-kan* di Kali Jodo. Waktu itu, dengan membandingkan keadaannya selama dipelihara si rentenir, rasanya dirinya semata-mata hanya diperlakukan sebagai benda bernyawa belaka, sedangkan kini ia merasa mulai menjadi manusia. Bahkan kemanusiaannya kini lebih utuh dibandingkan dengan keadaan dirinya selepas menjadi janda Bang Obar yang mati digulung gelombang.

Tan Peng Liang's mother advises him not to discard his first wife just for the sake of novelty:

A woman is not just a parcel of pickles. Remember, a woman is man's partner. A man can only be said to have reached perfection, when his masculinity is put to the test through his ability to accept the presence of a woman in his life. A man's perfection lies in his ability to become a husband, to be a partner to his wife. Without the influence of a woman in a man's life, it is impossible for him to be a good father. (Sylado 1999: 92) ⁷³

She also advises Tinung that marriage to a Chinese is not easy: as the Chinese consider themselves a superior culture to the Javanese, and that the only way for a woman to gain respect is to bear children. (Sylado 1999: 94)

Tinung's new life is fulfilling and fortunate, she has enough to eat, a nice house, and plenty of clothes; her parents are proud of her and she has gained respect in her village as a woman of substance. In fact (like the Girl from the Coast) Tinung has achieved celebrity status; her prosperity is signified by her clothing and jewellery:

This time she came to her village as a woman to be admired. She wore expensive clothes, with a silk shawl on her shoulders, and high-heeled sandals of carved wood. There was a gold necklace around her neck, gold bracelets on her wrists, gold studs in her ears, and gold rings on her fingers. She carried a leather handbag, filled with a seemingly endless supply of money. (Sylado 1999: 96) ⁷⁴

This new happiness does not last forever. When Tan Peng Liang is jailed for counterfeiting money, Tinung is forced to return to her village with her two children. Saodah persuades her to return to the River Jodo, and although Tinung is reluctant to resume her life as a prostitute, she has little choice. Tan Peng Liang has escaped from jail and is overseas; so Tinung is once more without a protector. 'Finally she gave in, like a tree that had toppled

⁷³ Wanita itu bukan bungkus pecel. Ingat, wanita itu mitra pria. Lelaki baru bisa dibilang sempurna, kalau kejantanannya diuji melalui kemampuannya menaruh unsur perempuan dalam hidupnya. Kesempurnaan lelaki adalah pada kesanggupannya menjadi suami, menjadi mitra atas istrinya. Tanpa unsur istri dalam kehidupan lelaki, maka lelaki tidak mungkin sempurna menjadi ayah.

⁷⁴ Kali ini dia datang ke kampung ini sebagai perempuan yang dipujikan. Pakaianya mahal. Selendang sutra menghias bahu. Kelom kayu ukir berhak tinggi. Di lehernya ada kalung emas, di tangannya ada gelang emas, di telinganya ada giwang emas, di jari-jarinya ada cincin emas. Dia juga menentang tas kulit berisi uang, entah berapa.

because its roots were not strong enough to withstand the whirlwind. She returned to the River Jodo.' (Sylado 1999: 221) ⁷⁵

At the time of the Japanese invasion of the Indies in 1942, Thio Boen Hap, Tan Peng Liang's major enemy from the Kong Koan (a Chinese business organization) recommends Tinung as an entertainer to the Japanese. She is taken from Gang Chaulan to the Japanese army headquarters, where she is gang-raped by half a dozen drunken Japanese soldiers. Tinung is like 'a sacrificial lamb, completely powerless'. (Sylado 1999: 286) ⁷⁶ This is another rite of passage: Tinung loses her identity. 'She no longer had a name. Her name had disappeared. Now she was given only a number. Number 33. She had become a comfort woman'. (Sylado 1999: 288). ⁷⁷

As a Japanese comfort woman in the barracks at Sukabumi, Tinung lives for four months 'like a chicken in a barn, with the other chickens'. In the barracks, she becomes a sexual object (*objek hiburan seks*) for countless Japanese soldiers, who are not satisfied with a passive sexual partner, but expect 'number 33' to take an active role. When Tan Peng Liang's cousin (who has a position in the Japanese Army) arranges her release, she has lost all sense of self-worth, has tried to kill herself twice, and is suffering from syphilis.

In a hospital in Bandung, Tinung slowly recovers her physical and mental health under the care of a Dutch nurse who eases her spiritual burdens by telling her 'It's only a sin', and assures her of God's mercy and forgiveness. (Sylado 1999: 293) Eventually she is reunited with Tan Peng Liang (II).

Tinung's crowning moment comes in 1955; she is seven months pregnant, and is eulogized by Tan Peng Liang (echoing his mother's philosophy): Tinung's achievement is as an inspiration to her husband, the feminine complement to masculinity.

There is only one person that has made me aware of love, and that is a woman. Yes, it is a woman who is always the inspiration for a man. A woman also who perfects the

⁷⁵ Akhirnya ia menyerah seperti pohon tumbang karena akarnya tidak kuat menahan angin puting beliung. Ia kembali ke Kali Jodo.

⁷⁶ Dan Tinung di situ adalah anak domba kurban yang tak berdaya.

⁷⁷ Ia tidak punya nama lagi. Namanya telah dilenyapkan. Kini ia hanya diberi nomer. Yaitu, nomer 33. Ia telah menjadi **jugun ianfu**. (The term for women forced to serve as prostitutes during the Japanese Occupation of the Netherlands Indies, 1942 - 1945.) For a background to forced prostitution during the Japanese Occupation, see also: Hicks 1995; Amsakasasi et al. 1992; Lucas 1995.

masculinity of a husband. Who is the woman that I refer to, my friends? I will ask her to stand beside me. She is Siti Nurhayati... She is my wife. (Sylado 1999: 382) ⁷⁸

Tinung does not resist the situations that life forces upon her. She is obedient to the suggestions of her family to become a prostitute. She is powerless to resist the various times she is thrown out of the house (first by her mother-in-law, and then by Tan Peng Liang's (II) sons), or kidnapped (by Tan Peng Liang I). Whenever the possibility of a 'protector' presents itself, she is compliant, although after meeting Tan Pen Liang (II) she remains attached to him for the rest of her life. Although she has no identity without Tan Peng Liang, except as an ignorant village girl, a prostitute or a fugitive, he admits he is also nothing without her. He accepts Tinung regardless of her past, unlike Rasus in *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, who constantly rejects Srintil's pleas for marriage on the grounds that the prosperity of the village rests on her identity as a ronggeng.

Sylado ascribes Tinung's powerlessness (at least in part) to her illiteracy – in fact she remains illiterate for the rest of her life. 'Perhaps Tinung's failing, like the majority of the people at that time, was that her family was illiterate, and had not received any education. They would never know, that in this life, people tended to use animal cunning: the strong would survive, the weak would be pushed aside and blamed.' (Sylado 1999: 12) ⁷⁹

On the one hand, Tinung appears to be the archetypical damsel in distress with almost no agency, on the other, her strength lies in her flexibility and ability to adapt to various cultural and sexual roles - as *ca-bau-kan* / entertainer, as *de facto* wife / mistress, and as Chinese daughter-in-law. Her female relatives, including her mother, encourage her to enter (and re-enter) the world of prostitution; evidently in the *kampong* material survival is more important than family reputation.

Her patrons, rescuers and protectors are men; it is only through powerful men that she achieves a measure of material success, and in the end is able to achieve a respectable marriage. Tinung's greatest virtue is her simplicity, and her ability to remain true to her core identity, but it is her primary attachment to Tan Peng Liang (II) that ensures her own

⁷⁸ Satu-satunya orang yang menyadarkan saya tentang cinta, adalah seorang perempuan, Ya, perempuanlah yang selalu menjadi ilham bagi seorang lelaki. Perempuan juga yang menyempurnakan kelakilakian seorang suami. Nah, siapa perempuan yang saya maksudkan itu, Saudara-saudara? Saya minta dia berdiri juga di sebelah saya. Dia adalah Siti Nurhayati... Dia istri saya.

⁷⁹ Barangkali kesalahan Tinung, seperti kesalahan umum masyarakat waktu itu, yang tidak disadari, adalah keluarganya butahuruf, tidak berpendidikan. Mereka tidak pernah tahu, bahwa dalam kehidupan ini, orang cenderung menggunakan etika binatang pintar: siapa kuat dia berhak hidup, siapa lemah dia tersingkir dan salah.

survival. In the end, she does not outlive Tan Peng Liang (II) for long, as she has no independent identity. One could say that she dies of a broken heart.

To sum up the historical narrative of the *nyai*: By the end of the nineteenth century, concubinage had become less acceptable. Several factors contributed to this: the opening of the Suez Canal facilitated closer contacts with Holland, the number of European women emigrating to the Indies increased and marriage bans on the plantations were lifted. 'To the extent that the possibility of marriage to a European increased, so the respect accorded to the native concubine declined, and after 1890 the number of such relationships fell away. This decrease, however, went hand in hand with an increase in prostitution.' (Ming 1983: 92).



Rob Nieuwenhuys (1982a: 201) confirms that while 'the life of the *budjang*, or bachelor, living with a concubine as a matter of course, had become a thing of the past', such relationships still persisted in the interior. In Nieuwenhuys' novel *Faded Portraits* (published in 1954 under the pseudonym E. Breton di Nijs) there is a portrait of such a relationship, a source of embarrassment to a genteel Eurasian family that is trying to breed out the 'dark blood' from their heritage; Uncle Alex, an '*orang udik*' (country bumpkin) who manages a family estate in the country and lives there with a *nyai*.⁸⁰ Although according to Hellwig (1992: 2 – 3) the *nyai* was absent in Indonesian literature from the 1920s to the 1980s, apparently she persisted as a shadowy presence in Dutch colonial literature at least until the mid twentieth century, 'a literature of lost causes, of a past irrevocably gone'. (E.M. Beekman, Introduction to Nieuwenhuys 1982b: xiv)



In the next chapter I introduce the tradition of *tayuban* or ritual dancers (*ronggeng*), depicted in relief carvings on the walls of Candi Borobudur in Java as early as the ninth century A.D. Originally an important focus for harvest and life cycle rituals in Indonesian villages in Java and Bali, the sacral role of *ronggeng* was also one of sexual service to their communities. This tradition is now regarded ambivalently by government authorities that seek to preserve local traditions while eliminating aspects inimical to Islam, such as sexuality, gambling and alcohol. In spite of these attempts at control, the *tayuban* and related traditions have been depicted in contemporary works of literature since the colonial era, and still survive in Java and Bali. The most controversial literary work with a

⁸⁰ In this novel Uncle Alex's three dark-skinned daughters by his *nyai* are appropriated by his sister, Aunt Sophie, who attempts to give them a good European upbringing.

ronggeng as central character is a trilogy of novels, *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* by Ahmad Tohari. This trilogy also reflects the conflict of local animist beliefs and practices with modern religious and moralizing agendas.

CHAPTER 3

DANCERS

SETTING THE SCENE

'That story begins with the story of a beautiful ronggeng, twenty years old, who was physically imprisoned and held psychologically captive within the walls of history, walls that had risen out of selfish greed and misadventure.' (Ahmad Tohari 2003b. *The Dancer*: 268)¹

It is clear that professional women entertainers in the Indonesian archipelago had both cultural and economic currency in the courts, in spite of their proletariat or exotic background, or a reputation for immorality. They were also important mediators between the courts and the common people, and the cosmic and mundane worlds.

In this chapter, I contextualize the singer-dancer tradition in Java and Bali from the fourteenth to the twenty-first century, from indigenous sources to the observations of Western visitors such as Raffles, and commentaries by Western and Indonesian scholars (Hefner 1987; Nugroho 2001; Cooper 2004). I then extend this overview to an analysis of selected literary works, beginning with Ahmad Tohari's trilogy *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, followed by two late New Order short stories by Dorothea Rosa Herliany and Nurdidayat Poso. What emerges in both scholarly and literary texts is a progressive ambivalence towards *ronggeng* / *tayuban*, the result of conflicts between animist traditions and modernizing Islam.

Women entertainers in Indies court culture, as well as being a source of prestige, could also generate income for kings, sultans and wealthy aristocrats by their performance skills. When the Dutch first arrived in Banten (Java) in 1596 they were entertained at night by singing and dancing from the female slaves of the merchant aristocrats. Evidently, 'the most exotic Persian dancing girls in Banten had reportedly cost two to three thousand guilders each.' (Reid 2000: 204) In Palembang (South Sumatra), in 1666, a Dutch envoy noted that when 'the ruler's maidens, bejewelled and adorned, enacted a play and danced for us, the King was well aware that this entertainment would

¹ The modern ronggeng (dancer) is known by various names depending upon her region of origin: In Java she is known as *ledhek*, *taledhek*, *tandak* or *ronggeng*, and in Bali, as *penari joged*. In Central Java there is a variation called *sindhèn* or *sintren*. (As distinct from *pesindhèn*, or solo singer). The generic term for this genre is *tayub* or *tayuban*.

swell his purse,' for guests were expected to present the performers with a sum of money. (Andaya 1993a: 96)

Outstanding performers from the countryside, including itinerant singer-dancers, could ultimately find employment in the courts, where they could be retained for many years. At that time, it was difficult to distinguish between court and popular cultures and the performers drawn from the proletariat can be said to have formed a bridge between both (Reid 1988: 203).²

Sometimes it was men from the courts, often those who played supporting comic roles in both *ronggeng* and more refined genres of dance, who recruited talent from the villages, and sometimes it was independent patrons who managed groups of dancers living in villages outside the palace walls. These villages were sometimes also locations of brothels. The 'talent scouts' from the courts located suitable candidates in the surrounding villages (sometimes women and girls who had 'caused public scandal through immoral conduct') and attended to their education and training as performers. (Sutton 1987: 125) ³

The Javanese singer-dancer tradition has existed at least since the ninth century A.D.,⁴ and is closely associated, both in musical style and ethos, with the proletariat rather than the courts. Her history can be traced back to a fourteenth century poem which describes a female entertainer called 'Mistress of the Wind', who sang and danced simultaneously.

The first part of her performance appears to have taken part outdoors in the village, and was witty, comical and erotic. During this phase, male members of the audience made gifts of clothing to her; a similar practice has been noted in twentieth century rural Java, where one or more *taledhek* dance with men in turn. Apparently it was 'the custom for men to throw articles of their own apparel ... on the floor at the feet of a female dancer as a token of admiration and erotic excitement.' (Sutton 1987: 121)

The second part of Mistress of the Wind's performance took part in the 'royal presence', where she joined the 'exalted members of the court' in drinking liquor and where some of

² See the following discussion about 'Mistress of the Wind'.

³ In my study of twentieth century Indonesian literature, I have found several examples of a man, or married couple, whose profession it was to prepare the village *ronggeng* for her role as entertainer, managing her performances and negotiating her sexual services with prospective clients, in return for a proportion of her earnings. (Tohari 2003; Poso 1994)

⁴ Claire Holt (1967: 138 - 139) mentions the existence of a relief sculpture in Candi Borobodur (ninth century A.D.) depicting a male and female dancer.

the males present were 'taken as companion by her' which could suggest sexual activity, or alternatively improvised dancing in the *joged* style.

Two further characteristics of the *ronggeng* are worth mentioning here: The first is her status as public property, therefore subverting feudal notions of ultimate obligation to an all-powerful ruler. The second is the enhancement of her physical attraction by the use of *susuk*, magic charms made of slivers or pins of metal, especially gold, which are inserted in various parts of her body. 'The men infatuated by the *pesindhen* will follow her anywhere, oblivious to normal social constraints, forgetting even the dangers of losing face through the opinion of the neighbours.' (Sutton 1987: 131)

A Javanese folk tale relates that the *ronggeng* was created by a wood carver, a tailor and a goldsmith, and brought to life by a *wali*, an Islamic holy man. He ordered the woman and her creators to wander the countryside, the three men playing musical instruments, the woman to sing and dance. 'And thus it was shown that the dance girl belongs not to one but to many' (Sutton 1987: 123). From this legend, it appears that the singer-dancer's roots were proletarian, and that, outside the courts, her patronage was the general public. She travelled in the company of male musicians, a situation that can still be seen in Java, in the form of small groups of itinerant musicians with a female singer, often denigrated as beggars and the woman as a prostitute.⁵

T.S. Raffles, writing in the early nineteenth century, also mentions the reputation of the *ronggeng*, who, he noted, were to be found in every principal town in Java, but especially in Sunda:

The common dancing girls of the country... are called *rong'geng*, and are generally of easy virtue. They make a profession of their art, and hire themselves to perform on particular occasions, for the amusement of the chiefs and of the public... Their conduct is generally so incorrect, as to render the title of *rong'geng* and prostitute synonymous; but it not unfrequently happens, that after amassing considerable wealth in the profession, they obtain, on account of their fortune, the hand of some petty chief. In this case, they generally after a few years retirement and domestic quiet, avail themselves of the facility of a divorce, and repudiating their husbands, return to their former habits. (Raffles 1988 (1817): 342)

⁵ In 2001, the present writer saw a similar group, three male musicians and a female singer, performing door-to-door in Tegal, Central Java.

Nineteenth and twentieth century travellers' accounts suggest that the *ronggeng* / *joged* tradition flourished in Java and Bali until the 1930s. In the 1880s, two Dutch visitors⁶ commented on dance performances in Balinese courts, distinguishing between public and private performances, although it appears that sexual services were available in both cases.

Since Indonesian independence, the roles of *pesindhen* (solo singer) and *ronggeng* (solo dancer) have been separated. The *pesindhen* plays a leading musical role in the shadow puppet theatre, while the solo dancer still performs at life cycle ceremonies in both Java and Bali. A modern manifestation of the singer-dancer is the *dangdut* performer who dances erotically and sings, although she is elevated on a stage at a remove from her predominantly male audience.

The *ronggeng* is thus quite distinct from the refined court dancers of Java and Bali. In addition, the public performances of the *ronggeng* are (or were) generally linked with sexuality and the bestowing of sexual favours. As a woman the *ronggeng* is considered public property. However, as a symbol of feminine fecundity, and even communal prosperity, her role was (and is) far more significant in Indonesian village society than simply that of village whore. Based on Theodore G. Pigeaud's analysis of popular dance traditions in Java, Hefner (1987: 86) confirms that 'tayuban and similar dance traditions have long been associated with rites of fertility and blessing, most commonly in the context of annual rites of village purification'.

In New Order Indonesia, *ronggeng* performances were generally marginalized or even suppressed, being regarded as immoral or backward. In addition, the *ronggeng*'s associations with conspicuous consumption, alcohol and gambling have tended to make her *persona non grata* with conservative Muslims.

Nugroho (2001: 12-29), through selected reports in the mass media, examines attitudes in late twentieth / early twenty-first century Indonesia towards *tayuban*, specifically its perceived departure from a former sacral function to become a secular and increasingly permissive form of popular entertainment. One source quoted by Nugroho (2001: 22, *Solopos* 18 July 2001) attributes the beginnings of the 'decline' (*pergeseran*) to Western influence during the Dutch colonial period, when the courts of Surakarta used *tayuban*

⁶ Bandem & deBoer 1991: 97 – 100. The first visitor was a Dutch Scholar, R. van Eck, the second a medical doctor, Julius Jacobs.

as an entertainment to welcome dignitaries from Holland, accompanied by hard liquor, sex and gambling.

However, the early nineteenth century Javanese text, *Serat Centhini*, describes at some length an event (which has parallels to the performance of 'Mistress of the Wind') where most of the participants end up drunk, and some even copulate on the dance floor. (Sutton 1987: 121-122) This, as well as the performance of "Mistress of the Wind" discussed above, suggests that elements of eroticism and hard liquor associated with *tayuban* have existed at least since the fourteenth century, long before the Dutch colonial period, as has *tayuban*'s association with the courts.

Nugroho also discusses the ambivalent attitude of local bureaucracies from the 1990s: while they have an agenda to protect, preserve and develop folk art forms such as *tayuban*, they also attempt to remove the elements of eroticism, alcohol and gambling by imposing regulations on the performers, and formalizing the art through festivals and competitions. This 'refining process', (*proses penghalusan*) has a sub-text: it denigrates folk art by stressing its vulgarity (comparing it unfavourably with the 'high art' of the *kraton*)⁷ and by imposing controls and proscriptions, takes it away from the *rakyat*. In Central Java, local government agencies such as the police department, the department of education and high school dance academies have been involved in the 'refinement project', as well as the monitoring of *tayuban* performances (Nugroho 2001: 24 – 29)⁸. However, the *tayuban* tradition (including *bersih desa* and *sedekah laut* rituals) still survives in some small towns and cities in rural Java though most performances are privately commissioned.⁹

The concept of the dancer as communal property reappears in twentieth century literary works, and in at least one case (Tohari's *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*) the dancer's proletariat connections attract accusations of communist collaboration, and lead to her imprisonment.

DANCERS IN LITERATURE

⁷ See Cooper 2004: 543 – 545, for a deconstruction of this view. She suggests that in fact folk traditions are the creative source of court dances.

⁸ See also Lysloff 2003 b: 461, for restrictions on *tayuban* in the Banyumas regency, the setting of Tohari's *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*.

⁹ See *Kolong Budaya* 1, August/September 2001: 30 – 46, for an account of a *tayuban* performance in the Blora area. The same issue of KB also contains an interview with a *ronggeng* and other relevant articles, including an interview with Ahmad Tohari.

Colonial Hierarchies of Race, Power and Gender

In twentieth century Indonesian literature, the *ronggeng* sometimes makes her appearance in a colourful episode, a metaphor for colonial hierarchies of race and power. In Mas Marco Kartodikromo's novel *Student Hidjo* (1919), for example, Willem Walter, a young Dutch official, dressed up in a borrowed Javanese *sarung* and headcloth, dances awkwardly with a *tandak* from Solo at a Regent's birthday party, much to the amusement of his Javanese companions. (Kartodikromo 2000: 76 – 77). Maier (2004: 173) describes Walter's effort to bridge the cultural gap as 'bizarre', and categorizes this incident as an example of 'the intransigence between two nations, two races, Dutch and Javanese... Javanese do not feel at ease in Holland, Dutch do not feel at ease in Java.' After quarter of an hour of providing amusement for his friends, Walter stops. 'There he stands, the white man, all by himself, misunderstanding, misunderstood – and rejected. " (idem: 177). What the young *Controleur* has misunderstood, and why the Javanese do not join in, is that on this particular occasion, the role of the *tandak* does not include dancing with males in public. (Kartodikromo 2000: 77).¹⁰

The heady mix of erotic dancing, hard liquor, gambling and sexual license associated with *ronggeng* entertainment during the colonial period is also described in post-colonial literary works, for example Umar Kayam's *Bawuk* (1970) and Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Bumi Manusia* (1980).¹¹

Pramoedya Ananta Toer in *Bumi Manusia* (This Earth of Mankind) depicts a *tayuban* performance as part of the program celebrating the appointment of a colonial official (a district head / *bupati*). The Assistant Resident, a European, is the first to take the sash, thus underling the protocol of colonialism:

The gamelan resumed its tumultuous din. A full-bodied dancer entered the arena, as if flying, carrying a tray, on which there was a sash. Carrying the silver tray, she made her way directly to the Assistant Resident. And the white official rose from his chair, took the sash and draped it over his shoulder... Unhesitatingly he stepped forward, partnered by the dancer, and moved into the centre of the gathering to the crowd's applause and cheering. And he danced, his two fingers holding the corners of the sash, and at every beat of the gong he jerked his head in rhythm with the gong. And before him that full-

¹⁰ Tetapi priyayi-priyayi lainnya tidak ada yang turut menandak. Sebab mereka mengerti bahwa tandak itu tidak untuk *tayub*. Primanto Nugroho (PC, June 2007) confirms that the appropriateness of *tayub* / *tandak* may vary depending on the level of Javanese society. The Regent of Djarak's birthday party is attended by the highest level of *priyayi* society.

¹¹ English translations of *Bumi Manusia* are by Max Lane, from *Awakenings*, 1982. The Indonesian text is from Pramoedya's *Bumi Manusia*, 1980. English translations of "Bawuk" are by John McGlynn 1993. The original Indonesian text is quoted from *Horison* V / 1, 1970

bodied, pretty, eye-catching woman danced provocatively. (Awakenings 1991a: 98 / BM 1980: 130) ¹²

Umar Kayam's novella "Bawuk" describes *tayuban* as part of the social fabric of Indies colonial society, together with drinking and small-scale gambling. There is also a mention of rooms provided for the purposes of sex with the *ledhek*. The erotic dancing of the *ronggeng*, the serving of alcohol, and the lustful competition and banter of Javanese élite males, have the flavour of an initiation. The story suggests that the party becomes even more licentious once the Dutch officials have gone home. The qualities of an ideal male partner for the female dancer or *ledhek* are described in some detail:

Only a special kind of man, one with singular charm and character, could distinguish himself at *tayuban* dancing. He had to be extremely light on his feet and possess great self-confidence; in short, he had to be a kind of Casanova. He could not appear embarrassed or hesitant when dancing with the *ledhek*, the female dancer skilled in the intricacies of sensual movement. He had to move along with her suggestive gyrations with a certain flair, and when the crowd began to whistle and yell for him to kiss his partner he must do so, with a smile at that. If it was late and the rhythmic beat of the drum filled the air, to gain even greater esteem he might lead the dancer from the floor and into one of the side rooms usually provided for that purpose. (*Menagerie 2* 1993: 164 / Kayam, 1970, *Horison V* / 1: 7) ¹³

Bawuk's father is a minor official in the colonial hierarchy, and, although, like Willem Walter, he is an awkward dancer without the 'required flair', he is pressured by the regent, a colonial official of higher status, into taking his turn dancing with the *ledhek*. This episode is seen through the eyes of the official's wife. She maintains a refined aloofness publicly, but goes home early with a headache.

¹² Gamelan kembali menderu riuh. Seorang penari dengan badan berisi seperti terbang memasuki gelanggang membawa talam berisi sampur. Dengan talam perak itu langsung ia datang pada Tuan Asisten Residen. Dan pembesar putih itu berdiri dari kursinya, mengambil sampur dan menyelendangkan pada bahu sendiri... Dengan langkah tanpa ragu, dalam iringan penari itu, ia masuk ke tengah kalangan di bawah sorak berderai. Dan menari ia dengan jari-jari menjempit ujung sampur, *perpacakgulu* pada setiap jatuh gung. Di hadapannya penari cantik menarik dengan badan berisi menari giral.

¹³ *Tajuban* adalah satu kesenangan yang menuntut lebih banyak lagi sikap serta *tjita-rasa* yang khusus. Untuk ini dibutuhkan perwatakan serta "type" yang chas lagi. Dia mestilah seorang Casanova yang gembira, lintjah dan luwes. Dia mestilah seorang yang tidak kaku dan ragu2 membuat gerakan2 tandak apalagi malu2 dalam menghadapi liak-liuk si *ledek* atau *ronggeng* yang penuh dengan isyarat serta senyum yang sensuil itu. Pada saat2 tertentu, pada *djatuhnja* sesuatu pukulan gong, si *penajub* diharapkan oleh *ledek* (dan juga oleh para hadirin) untuk *mentjium pipi* si *ledek*. Dan bila malam telah larut, bau mulut para *penajub* itu telah membusa dengan *jenewer* dan *whisky*, *kendang* telah disentakkan dengan suara yang suggestif, si *penajub* boleh sadjah menarik si *ledek* masuk kedalam kamar.

Then, for the first time in her married life, Mrs Suryo saw her husband, on a dance floor in front of her friends and acquaintances, kiss the woman, a *ledhek* dancer, no better than a prostitute! She concealed her feelings—after all she was an official's wife—and continued playing cards as if what had just happened was a normal, acceptable occurrence. Even when her husband began to pull Prenjak away from the dance floor and off toward one of the small side rooms to the accompaniment of the guests' hoots and haws, she did not rustle in her chair. She dealt the cards without a flick of tension in her wrists. She was a woman of the upper class. (*Menagerie* 2 1993: 166 / Kayam 1970, *Horison* V/ 1: 8) ¹⁴

In “Bawuk”, what is revealed is the double standard: between the sexual license permitted to men, and the acquiescence expected of their wives. The sexuality of the *ledhek* is at the centre of attention, while the wives of Javanese officials are in the demeaning position of passive and unprotesting witnesses on the margins, constrained to silence. .

Srintil: Prisoner of History, Illusions of Kodrat

I now turn to the most complete literary account of the life of a *ronggeng*: Ahmad Tohari's *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* (RDP). It is a trilogy of novels originally published in the 1980s¹⁵ to critical acclaim and reissued as one volume by Gramedia Pustaka in February 2003. Later the same year, the Lontar Foundation published an English translation of the trilogy by ethnomusicologist René T. A. Lysloff (*The Dancer*, 2003).¹⁶ Discovering the first volume of the trilogy by chance, Lysloff became intrigued by the work. ‘I pondered the ethnographic truth of the novel – wondering where fiction could be separated from fact in its depiction of an isolated Javanese village and the people who lived there... I felt certain that Tohari had described a real world within the fiction of his novel’. (Lysloff 2003a: viii)

The novels are set in an isolated hamlet in Central Java, based, according to Lysloff, on Pakuncen, a settlement not far from Tohari's own village of Tinggarjaya, Banyumas,

¹⁴ Dan untuk pertama kalinya selama hidupnya Surjo menjadi njonja Surjo, dia melihat suaminya menjium pipi seorang ledhek didepan orang banyak. Sebagai seorang istri prijaji sedjati tentulah njonja Surjo harus bisa menyembunikan apa yang terasa didalam hatinya. Dengan tenang dia terus melempar kartunya kemedja, seakan-akan apa yang terjadi ditengah pendopo itu adalah sesuatu yang sudah rutin baginya. Dan pada waktu suaminya diiringi sorakan tamu2 mulai menjeret Prendjak kebelakang kamar yang sudah tersedia, njonja Surjo dengan tenang tetap terus bermain kartu sampai selesai.

¹⁵ *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* 1982 (RDP); *Lintang Kemukus Dini Hari* 1985 (LKD); *Jantera Bianglala* 1986 (JB).

¹⁶ English translations of *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* are by René Lysloff, from *The Dancer*, 2003 (Cited as *The Dancer*). The Indonesian text is taken from the compendium volume *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, 2003, Gramedia, Jakarta (RDP)

Central Java. In the novels, it is constantly referred to as isolated, ignorant and backward, 'a tiny world of poverty, hunger and near hopelessness'. (Lysloff 2003b: 454)

The trilogy covers the years 1946 – 1971, and the connecting thread is the relationship between Rasus, a young goatherd who leaves Paruk to join the army, and Srintil, the *ronggeng* who becomes the lynchpin of the story. It is through Srintil's tragic history that a series of conflicted relationships gradually unfold: The relationship of Dukuh Paruk with the outside world; Srintil's own relationship with Rasus; his relationship with his vanished mother; and Paruk's gradual but innocent involvement with the communist movement of the 1960s.

Throughout the novel, Srintil is divided between two contradictory personas: her divinely ordained role as a *ronggeng*, using her sexual powers to manipulate male desire, and her aspirations to be a modest and submissive wife with the attributes of *kodrat wanita*.¹⁷ In this chapter I analyze to what extent this proletarian heroine has control over her fate, and her power to resist the expectations that Paruk and the wider world force upon her.

In the opening chapter, Rasus and his friends meet with the 11 year-old Srintil. The four friends play-act a *ronggeng* scenario. It is in this scene that Srintil's future as a *ronggeng* is foreshadowed, a future over which she will have little control.

In the hamlet there was a powerful belief that a true *ronggeng* dancer was not the result of teaching. No matter how she was trained, a young woman could not become a *ronggeng* dancer without being possessed by the *indang* spirit.¹⁸ In the world of *ronggeng*, the *indang* was revered as a kind of supernatural godmother. (*The Dancer*: 8 / RDP: 13)¹⁹

The village elders hope that the reincarnation of the *indang* in Srintil will return good fortune to the village, neutralising the series of disasters that has plagued Paruk for eleven years. The *ronggeng* and its *calung* orchestra are Dukuh Paruk's only

17 See also Cooper 2004: 551: 'Two main models for women can be discerned in the trilogy. The first is one of feminine power expressed through the flaunting of sexuality; the ultimate icon of this model is the *ronggeng*... The second feminine model presented is that of respectability, accomplished through controlling female sexuality and typified by the *ibu rumah tangga* 'housewife' of aristocratic or modern middleclass families.'

18 *Indang* is the maternal ancestor spirit of the village embodied in the *ronggeng* dancer: a female counterpart to the male spirit of the village founder.

19 Di pedukuhan itu ada kepercayaan kuat, seorang *ronggeng* sejati bukan hasil pengajaran. Bagaimana diajari, seorang perawan tak bisa menjadi *ronggeng* kecuali roh *indang* telah merasuk tubuhnya. *Indang* adalah semacam wangsit yang dimuliakan di dunia peronggengan.

pretensions to culture and entertainment. Thus Srintil now represents the optimistic hopes of a community blighted by drought and poverty to regain its prosperity and renew its spiritual strength.

There are several rituals that precede Srintil's becoming a *ronggeng*. First, she is presented to the *dukun ronggeng* and his wife, who instruct Srintil in the finer arts of dancing and singing, as well as the insertion of gold talismans under her skin to make her more alluring. The final ritual is the *bukak-klambu*, or 'opening of the mosquito net'; actually a ceremonial rape in which Srintil's virginity is sold to the highest bidder.

The celebration of Srintil's rites of passage is shadowed by the 'other path' – that of the 'good girl', aspiring to be a wife and mother. That she has a *jodoh* or soul mate in Rasus further complicates her trajectory as village dancer from the beginning. Before the *bukak-klambu* ritual takes place, Srintil makes a deliberate choice, subverting the ritual by presenting her virginity to Rasus before the two contenders have had a chance to stake their claim. Rasus has also symbolically 'married' Srintil by giving her a special heirloom *keris* (Javanese ceremonial dagger). This is the start of the conflict between Srintil's role as *ronggeng*, the symbol of the village's fecundity and prosperity, and her desire to be just an ordinary woman, with all the accoutrements of wife- and motherhood.

Over the next eight years, Srintil becomes established as a *ronggeng*, with a growing reputation outside the village of Paruk. Yet each time she asserts herself, or begins to feel established in her role, Rasus (as the shadow husband, a reminder of the mainstream patriarchal discourse of *kodrat wanita*) reappears in her life, creating confusion and disappointment.

If Rasus is able to put Paruk behind him and move forward to experience the masculine world of the army, the reverse is true for Srintil. Her 'natural instincts as a woman', and her love for Rasus, plunge her into illness and despair. During this time too, she has the chance to re-evaluate her position as a *ronggeng*.

At first, servicing strangers had not presented a moral problem for Srintil. But, the experience that she had shared with Rasus... provided her with an unsettling comparison. The difference was vast: he had made a profound impression, one that had far more

meaning, since her experience with him was not only physical but also spiritual. (The Dancer: 151 / RDP: 141 - 142) ²⁰

As she grows up, Srintil begins to make further choices that subvert the role of *ronggeng* – she adopts a child and begins to lactate, thus fulfilling her desire for motherhood in spite of a massage that is believed to have blighted her fertility. She also rebels against the authority of the *dukun* and his wife and demands to make her own choices about suitors. Thus she earns the respect of her mentors.

Ironically, the *rakyat* affiliations of Srintil and the *calung* orchestra lead the village into disaster in 1965 when Communist Party supporters manipulate their performances. Srintil herself does not understand either the need for political rallies and speeches, nor their underlying ideology. The village elders, Srintil and the leader of the *calung* orchestra are arrested and imprisoned as Communist sympathisers.

It is never directly stated what happens to during her two years' imprisonment, but from retrospective remarks it is clear that, because of her beauty and her history as a *ronggeng*, Srintil is taken outside the prison from time to time to 'entertain' the soldiers who work there. Tohari, who chooses to 'erase' this period of her life, becomes her apologist:

It was not possible though, for even the most skilled biographer to write about this period of Srintil's life. In the first place, no one had been willing to talk about her whereabouts or circumstances during those two years. Secondly, in absolute and utter desperation, Srintil had resolved to say nothing to anyone about what she had endured. And it was unlikely that she would ever publish her memoirs as she could neither read nor write... Some people might say that, to surrender to the mystery of time is a form of weakness and abject despair. These people could never be satisfied with the idea that two years of Srintil's life could simply be erased from all record, to remain an historical unknown. (The Dancer: 310 – 311 / JB: 37) ²¹

²⁰ Melayani laki-laki yang baru dikenalnya mula-mula tidak mendatangkan masalah batiniah pada diri *ronggeng* itu. Tetapi pengalaman yang sama bersama Rasus, laki-laki belia yang dikenalnya sejak masa kanak-kanak dengan ikatan batin yang kuat, memberi Srintil sebuah perbandingan yang timpang. Sangat jauh berbeda, lebih berkesan, lebih banyak mengandung makna karena bukan hanya raga, melainkan juga jiwa, yang menyatu.

²¹ Kemudian, mungkinkah kiranya seorang penyusun riwayat hidup yang paling unggul sekalipun mampu menyelesaikan pekerjaannya bila yang harus dia susun adalah biografi Srintil? Karena pertama, tak seorang pun bersedia memberi keterangan di mana dan bagaimana Srintil selama masa dua tahun lebih itu. Kedua, Srintil sudah mengunci dirinya pada satu tekad bulat bahwa dia tidak akan berkata apa pun dan kepada siapa pun tentang pengalamannya. Ketiga, sebenarnya orang bisa berharap pada suatu ketika kelak Srintil menerbitkan sebuah *memoar*. Namun harapan ini pasti sia-sia karena Srintil sama sekali buta huruf... Tetapi akan ada orang mengatakan, menyerah kepada kunci waktu adalah

After her release from prison Srintil makes an effort to reinvent herself. There is a marked change in both her dress (to a modest, non-provocative style) and her demeanour. She also refuses to return to her former life of prostitution, thus disappointing the materialistic hopes of Mrs. Kartareja.

Her knot of hair was loose, worn, as most women wore their hair, modestly low to hide the nape of her neck. In the past, Srintil had knotted her hair high up on her head so that her nape, a characteristic aspect of her beauty, was exposed. Her blouse was now cut long, hanging well over her hips, and her skirt was loose fitting like that of a farm girl, so that when she walked her calves remained covered. But what impressed them most was the difference in her demeanor. Her eyes avoided all contact, her expression was frozen, and she never smiled... the people [at Dawuan market] were aware that the woman who had once sexually charged the atmosphere there had returned with her soul torn, her behaviour completely changed. So shattered was Srintil's image that the people found it impossible to be open and natural to the recently released political prisoner. (*The Dancer*: 315 – 317 / JB: 43 - 45) ²²

The remainder of the narrative describes the tragic failure of Srintil to erase the stigmas of *ronggeng* and ex-political prisoner – making it impossible for her to live the normal, respectable life that she craves. She has given up on Rasus, but is determined to become the wife of a visiting civil servant from Jakarta, in spite of her past. Her role model is, ironically, the wife of the army captain in the prison at Eling-Eling, whom she tries to emulate in dress and demeanour. Srintil's fantasies of casting off her past by becoming a housewife have blossomed. In this way she will redeem herself socially and personally. And the role she envisages foreshadows the subservient position of *kodrat wanita* of New Order Indonesia.

kelemahan dan keputusan yang harus dibuang jauh. Orang-orang semacam ini tetap tidak puas apabila rekaman sejarah Srintil sepanjang dua tahun terhapus percuma dan hanya direlakan menjadi bagian rahasia sejarah. *This passage is omitted from Tohari's trilogy republished by Gramedia in 2003. I have taken the Indonesian text from the third book of Tohari's trilogy, *Jantera Bianglala* (JB) republished by Gramedia in 1995.

²² Sanggulnya rendah, sanggul Perempuan kebanyakan, sehingga tenguknya tersembunyi. Dulu Srintil selalu menyanggul rambutnya tinggi-tinggi sehingga tenguknya, salah satu hiasan kecantikannya, seakan ditawarkan kepada siapa saja yang melihatnya. Kebayanya menutup jauh di bawah pinggul dan kainnya kombok gaya perempuan petani. Tidak ketat dan ketika melangkah betis Srintil tetap tersembunyi di balik kainnya. Dan perubahan yang paling mengesankan orang-orang pasar Dawuan adalah perilaku Srintil. Matanya selalu menghindari dari tatapan orang yang melihatnya. Wajahnya kaku, sungguh-sungguh tanpa senyum... Tetapi orang-orang di sana mencatat pagi itu telah datang seseorang yang dulu selalu membawa suasana bergairah dan kini muncul kembali dengan kecompang-campingan jiwa yang tergambar jelas dari segala perikalunya. Demikian compang-camping citra diri Srintil sehingga orang pasar Dawuan atau siapa saja tidak mampu mengambil sikap yang jujur dan wajar terhadap dia yang baru pulang dari keterasingan itu.

*See Note, above. There is no corresponding Indonesian text in the 2003 Gramedia trilogy.

She felt a powerful urge to clean the floor that looked as if it had not been swept for several days... Srintil's imagination soared unrestrained. Yes, soon I will do everything for him. Bajus will see that even a former ronggeng dancer and political prisoner like me can be a good wife, and that I can be better than a woman who was never a ronggeng dancer or a prisoner. Yes. Someone like Bajus – a man who has never behaved discourteously toward me as an unmarried woman, who helped me build my house, who often takes me along with him on drives, and who has done so much to raise my status in the eyes of the people – surely he is the best man to receive my whole-hearted commitment... The question now is, when will I officially become his wife? (*The Dancer*: 417 / RDP: 364) ²³

However, Bajus has a hidden agenda; he intends to manipulate Srintil's beauty and sexuality for his own advancement. At the height of Srintil's fantasies about marriage, the extent of his deception is revealed. He asks her to return his 'favours' by spending the night with a first-level contractor from whom he hopes to secure a building sub-contract. When she refuses, he reminds her of her past and her lowly origins.

"As a Paruk Villager, you should remember who you are. You were a PKI member, a communist sympathizer! If you don't do what I say, I'll have you returned to prison. Do you think I can't do it?" He slammed the door violently and locked it. (*The Dancer*: 428 / RDP: 374) ²⁴

Behind the locked door (which also symbolises the end of Srintil's aspirations and dreams) Srintil loses her mind – a common outcome for women in literature pushed to the limit of their emotions.²⁵ Robbed of her illusions of wifehood, she has nothing left. Her desire to leave her past behind her has also been shattered by Bajus' accusations of her status as an ex-communist and political prisoner.

²³ Entahlah, Srintil merasakan keinginan yang kuat untuk membersihkan lantai yang mungkin sudah dua hari tidak terkena sapu...Angan-angan Srintil mengembang tak tertahan. Ya, kelak akan kubereskan semuanya. Mas Bajus kan melihat bukti bahwa bekas ronggeng atau bekas tahanan pun bisa menjadi istri yang baik, dan bisa lebih baik daripada perempuan bukan bekas ronggeng atau perempuan bukan bekas tahanan. Ya. Orang seperti Mas Bajus tidak mau membuat sembrono sebelum ada ikatan perkawinan, yang membantu membuat rumah baru, yang sering membawaku bertamasya, dan yang mengangkat martabatku di mata semua orang, pastilah laki-laki yang amat layak menerima pengabdianku sepenuh hati... Persoalannya sekarang, kapanakah aku akan resmi menjadi istri Mas Bajus?

²⁴ "Kamu orang Dukuh Paruk mesti ingat. Kamu bekas PKI! Bila tidak mau menurut akan aku kembalikan kamu ke rumah tahanan. Kamu kira aku tidak bisa melakukannya?" Pintu terbanting dan dikunci dari luar.

²⁵ See the final chapter of this thesis: SILENCE / MADNESS / DEATH.

In the space of just a few moments, Srintil became an empty shell. This empty shell, this shadow, might still be called Srintil or the *ronggeng* of Paruk Village. Of course, she would still be referred to as a human being. But what had previously distinguished her from lower organisms – her reason and her sense of self – simply vanished from that moment. Srintil no longer knew anything from any perspective whatsoever. She was no longer aware of herself, existing now only as an embodiment of living but useless flesh... A human soul no longer existed in her being. (*The Dancer*: 429 / RDP: 374 – 375) ²⁶

This is the state of affairs when Rasus returns to Paruk with lofty ideals of saving his village from squalor, ignorance, obscenity and poverty. He has adopted Islam while in the army, and believes that the grace of God is the ideal on which the salvation of the village can rest. Rasus now emerges as the saviour of both Srintil and his village, deciding to marry Srintil and to lead Paruk to harmony and reason through Islam. And at this point the *ronggeng* tradition is identified as the source of the village's continuing misfortunes, an inappropriate philosophical basis for existence. The animist tradition of *ronggeng* is seen as a manifestation of primitive desire and not in line with the religious and philosophical values that Rasus espouses. Thus this tradition is culturally devalued and denied a place in the history of Paruk.

Because it had never tried to develop its ability to reason, my village had never tried to find harmony with God. Like my mother, it remained asleep dreaming its naïve dreams—naiveté that gave birth to the tradition of *ronggeng* dancers. By itself, *ronggeng* would not be wrong if it were in line with the larger scheme of things. However, the *ronggeng* tradition that had developed in Paruk was one that exploited primitive desire. And because of that, it did not enjoy God's mercy.... I realized that I would have to help Paruk Village find itself again. I could help it find peace through the Almighty whose mercy is without bounds. (*The Dancer*: 450 – 451 / RDP: 394 – 395) ²⁷

Throughout the novels Srintil is rarely allowed to speak directly for herself. Her life is interpreted through others, through the dukun and his wife, through the voice and

²⁶ Sosok itu tentu masih bernama Srintil atas *ronggeng* Dukuh Paruk. Tentu pula dia masih akan disebut sebagai manusia. Namun faktor yang membedakan antara dirinya dengan segala jenis satwa—akal budi dan kesadarannya—sudah gaib sedetik yang lalu. Srintil tidak tahu lagi apa pun dari segi keberadaan dirinya. Dia tidak tahu lagi dirinya yang kini tinggal menjadi monument seongkok benda organik... Roh kemanusiaan tidak tampak lagi sedikit pun.

²⁷ Karena tak pernah atau tak mampu mengembangkan akal budipyula, tanah airku yang kecil sesungguhnya tak pernah berusaha menyelaraskan diri dengan selera Ilahi. Ibuku telah sekian lama terlena dalam krida batin yang naif, kenaifan mana telah melahirkan antara lain *ronggeng-ronggeng* Dukuh Paruk. *Ronggeng* sendiri mestinya tiada mengapa bila dia memungkinkan ditata dalam keselarasan agung. Namun *ronggeng* yang mengembangkan wawasan berahi yang primitif ternyata tidak mendatangkan rahmat kehidupan... Dukuh Paruk harus kubantu menemukan dirinya kembali, lalu kuajak mencari keselarasan di hadapan Sang Wujud yang serba tanpa batas.

thoughts of Rasus, through the reflections of the army captain in the prison at Eling-Eling, or through the didactic intrusions of the narrator and/or author – all patriarchal figures. Therefore she is presented as object, an unfortunate victim of history and circumstance, an embodiment of backwardness and illiteracy, without agency, although she makes continual efforts to resist. In the end, Srintil becomes indistinguishable from her village, the marriage to Rasus a metaphor to signify the victory of Islam over animism and of reason over primitive desire.²⁸ Her salvation and aspirations to respectability can only be achieved by being co-opted into patriarchal ideals of religious reform and modernization. As Cooper (2004: 553) remarks, '[I]n the narrative, the indigenous model is more or less abandoned for the new.'

The narrator/author continually suggests, either directly or indirectly, that Srintil's allegiance to Rasus and the institution of monogamous marriage are infinitely superior to her existence as *ronggeng*. The didactic messages that direct Srintil's progress on the path to respectable womanhood are too numerous to cite individually: they begin with Rasus' reactions to the *ronggeng* tradition, followed by the moralizing interventions of an external narrator, and finally, the voice of Rasus (after his conversion to Islam) and that of the author / narrator merge. The philosophical asides about the distinctions between primitive desire and civilized passion clearly do not reflect the thoughts of an uneducated village girl, who, as the author/narrator points out, has a 'somewhat superficial' understanding of these matters. [*The Dancer*: 336]

[S]he had eventually learned for herself life's bitter lessons about being a woman who belonged to everyone. She had reversed her original understanding, and now believed that to become the wife of a particular man was essential in balancing out femininity and masculinity. Thus, she saw now that the duties of a wife were nobler than those of a *ronggeng*. (*The Dancer*: 377 / RDP: 328) ²⁹

Cooper (2004: 540) suggests that Srintil *embodies* rather than *expresses*, a 'dramatic' power; an understated charisma which is 'in the moment of interaction and escapes easy quantification and definition'; its impact can be measured by the efforts to suppress it. However, 'dramatic power' seems to have little to do with agency, and in the case of Srintil as 'sacred maid', she is 'stripped of the very factors that made her sacred to her

²⁸ The reason / desire (*akal / nafsu*) binary frequently occurs in Islamic culture. See for example, James Siegel's study of Aceh, *The Rope of God*, (1969), Berkeley, California.

²⁹ Kemudian Srintil sendiri yang merasakan kepahitan sejarah hidup yang ditempuhnya sebagai perempuan milik umum. Dia ingin membalik pengertian semula; menjadi istri laki-laki tertentu adalah inti keberimbangan antara keperempuanan dan kelelakian. Maka tugas seorang istri lebih mulia daripada tugas seorang *ronggeng*.

people, namely virginity, enhanced attractiveness, indigenous fertility belief system, strong kin ties and a pre-industrial subsistence economy.' (Cooper 2004: 542)

Thus Srintil, who has been a central, even iconic figure, continuing a feminine tradition essential to the prosperity and spiritual identity of her village, loses her celebrity status through the accidents of history and the interventions of progress, and becomes a political and social pariah and a symbol of a vanishing way of life that is inappropriate to the modern age. She becomes a truly marginal figure, displaced by an Islamicized and industrial world view.

I now discuss two short stories from late New Order Indonesia that deal with the social dynamics as well as personal and political ambivalence towards the display of female power: "Dongeng Murti" (Murti's story, 1994), by Dorothea Rosa Herliany, and "Sintren Randu Alas" (The Sintren of Randu Alas, 1994) by Nurhidayat Poso.

Late New Order Narratives: Desire and Ambivalence

Although written by a woman, "Dongeng Murti" is told from the point of view of Murti's boyfriend, Ganif, with passages of interior monologue representing Ganif's thoughts and reflections.³⁰ Ganif's ambivalence about Murti's profession as a *ledhek* parallels that of Rasus in *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*.

Murti herself is portrayed as vulnerable, passive and fragile. She is clearly aware of the social implications of her *ledhek* role, the embarrassment of Ganif's parents if they find out, and her social responsibility to the villagers. At first, she offers to leave the group if Ganif wishes it.

"If you don't like me this way, I don't mind leaving the group. As it's for you, I won't be cross if I have to stop dancing" said the girl, almost inaudibly... No boy likes his sweetheart to be a *ledhek*," said Murti softly. (*Dongeng Murti*: 57)³¹

Ganif sees Murti as 'a totally powerless creature' and at the mercy of primitive passions, obviously a projection of his anxiety of seeing his sweetheart as the object of male desire.

³⁰ English translations of this "Dongeng Murti" are by the present writer. The story was written in 1994 and published in Dorothea's collection of short stories: *Perempuan yang Menunggu*, IndonesiaTera 2000 (56 – 61).

³¹ "Kalau Mas *nggak* senang Murti begini, Murti *nggak* keberatan keluar dari rombongan. Demi Mas, Murti *nggak* *ngesel* kalau musti berhenti nari," kata gadis itu, hampir tak terdengar... Semua cowok *nggak* akan suka kekasihnya menjadi seorang *ledhek*," kata Murti liris.

It is apparently the power of Murti's sexuality to arouse these instincts that is the source of his feelings of helplessness and confusion.

He mingled with the audience, taking a seat in a corner away from the hysteria. However, his attention was diverted by the hordes of people that crowded around, half drunk, the yells of uncouth men, and the beautiful village women who danced amidst the thunder of the gamelan and heavy breathing. (*Dongeng Murti*: 57) ³²

A subsequent performance intensifies Ganif's anxiety:

The people were paying less and less attention to the violent efforts of the guards to restrain them. They pushed and shoved, as if they were inspired to protest that it was their right to enjoy their possession, unhindered by any show of force. Ganif became anxious. From time to time he cast a warning glance at Murti-- her slender, graceful body dancing in time to the singing, the beat of the drum and the gamelan. (*Dongeng Murti*: 58) ³³

As time goes on Ganif feels that he does not possess Murti completely. Again, Murti clarifies the situation for him: she is already a 'possession' of the rakyat. In other words, she is sexually involved with her audience. Again, she offers to leave the group.

I have already become their possession, Mas. That's the reality. If you don't like it, I must leave the group, and stop being a dancer. Is that what you want?" (*Dongeng Murti*: 59) ³⁴

Ganif's torment is interspersed with idyllic moments with Murti, but eventually he is forced to make the decision to part from her. The fate of Murti is not revealed.

The story ends in future time, with Ganif sitting at his typewriter in front of a blank sheet of paper. Although he has been married for five years, his world is still empty and disappointing. It is not even possible for him to write about it. The issue remains

³² Laki-laki itu berbaur dengan penonton. Lalu mengambil tempat di sebuah sudut yang terurug histeria orang-orang. Namun, pikirannya menerawang pada kerumunan orang-orang yang berjejal setengah mabuk, jeritan-jeritan pria kasar, dan wanita-wanita dusun yang elok menari di antara gemuruh gamelan dan nafas.

³³ Orang-orang makin tak peduli kekerasan petugas menghalau mereka. Mereka berebut, seolah semangat protes bahwa hak asasi mereka untuk menikmati milik mereka sendiri tak layak dibendung oleh kekuatan apapun, memberi semangat bagi mereka. Ganif menjadi cemas. Sese kali ia melontarkan sorot mata yang penuh rasa was-was kepada Murti--tubuh runcing yang gemulai itu menari seirama alunan tembang dan hentakan gendang dan gamelan.

³⁴ "Murti sudah menjadi milik mereka, Mas. Itu kenyataannya. Kalau Mas tak ingin itu, Murti harus keluar dari grup, dan berhenti sebagai penari. Apakah Mas ingin begitu?"

unresolved. Murti's dedication to her community role as *ledhek* has proved stronger than his desire to possess her. However, whatever choice Murti makes she is still a possession, either of one man or as the focus of communal lust.

In "Sintren Randu Alas" (1994)³⁵, an unusual version of the *ronggeng* theme, Nurhidayat Poso, a writer from Tegal, Central Java, relates the story of a *sintren*³⁶ dancer who not only subverts the expectations of her role but also terrorizes her village by running amok. The village of Randu Alas, like Dukuh Paruk, still practises animist rituals, and has as its spiritual centre the grave of a common ancestor, Mbah Panggung. There is also an *indang* or maternal spirit that possesses successive *Sintren*.

Si Wuk, the new *sintren* in the village of Randu Alas, is regarded as less than ideal for this role. She is ugly, unpopular, and on the verge of becoming an old maid, in fact the antithesis of the beauty and charisma typical of ritual dancers.

Wasn't it true that Si Wuk had already passed her use-by date? In Randu Alas, girls of her age had usually produced four babies. But not a single young man had ever paid a call to Si Wuk's house, let alone proposed to her. In fact, she was often the butt of village jokes. Si Wuk was not at all pretty. She was skinny, with an angular face, a mole the size of a mung bean on her chin, a flat nose and frizzy hair. (*Sintren Randu Alas*: 12) ³⁷

In spite of being an unlikely candidate, Si Wuk is instructed in the arts of being a *sintren* by the *dukun* Ki Jlonggrang and his assistant, Yu Min. She has fasted for a week under the guidance of Yu Min in preparation for her debut. The atmosphere is electric. Si Wuk will be fulfilling not only her mother's hopes, but also the expectations of her village. The occasion is a festival of thanksgiving to the sea, and the *sintren* performance will be the highlight of the evening.

While the crowd waits for the ritual to begin, the gossip is rife among the disappointed *sintren* candidates.

³⁵ The original Indonesian text of "Sintren Randu Alas" was published in *Horison*, August 1994: 11-13. English translations are the present writer's and may differ slightly from my initial translation ("The Sintren of Randu Alas") published in *Coast Lines* 2, 2002: 40 – 42.

³⁶ *Sintren* is a central Javanese variation of *ronggeng*, where the dancer is enclosed in a covered wicker cage for part of the performance.

³⁷ Bukankah Si Wuk sebagai seorang gadis telah begitu kadaluwarsa. Di dusun Randu Alas gadis sebaya Si Wuk bahkan telah melahirkan empat bayi. Tapi si Wuk jangankan hidup bebojo, satu gelintir pemuda pun tak ada yang pernah bertandang ke rumahnya. Si Wuk bahkan sering menjadi olok-olok pemuda-pemuda dusun Randu Alas. Si Wuk memang tidak cantik, wajahnya tirus, dengan tai lalat sebiji kacang hijau di dagu, berhidung pesek, kurus, dan berambut kriting.

In the midst of the crowd of spectators, the gossip crept from mouth to mouth among the young girls of Randu Alas. They were somewhat annoyed when Si Wuk's made her appearance as the Sintren chosen by Ki Jlonggrang. What were his reasons for choosing her? Hadn't many other girls been passed over by Ki Jlonggrang, although they had all the necessary qualifications to become a Sintren? (*Sintren Randu Alas*: 12)³⁸

The chicken's cage that is used to cover Si Wuk is also charged with magical significance; it is a ritual object that has been used for generations and between performances it is kept 'in the most spooky place in Randu Alas, ... Mbah Panggung's grave.' It is part of the 'impenetrable mystery' that surrounds the village of Randu Alas.³⁹

Up to the point where she is enclosed in the chicken's cage, Si Wuk has not said a word. She has merely obeyed the instructions and exhortations of her mother and the *dukun*'s assistant. From the beginning, attention has been on the dominant male figure of the *dukun*, 'aloof, powerful and full of mysterious energy'.

They would have to wait for some time, for the spirit of the Sintren to enter Si Wuk's body, before the cage was opened. Ki Jlonggrang gyrated; the smoke of incense was dispersed round the field. Everyone, young and old, men and women, were absorbed in Ki Jlonggrang's magic power. He muttered mantras, as if oblivious of his surroundings. Apparently he had fallen into a state of trance. (*Sintren Randu Alas*: 12)⁴⁰

More than an hour later the cage is opened, and the focus shifts to Si Wuk. Not only has she been transformed into a pretty girl wearing fine clothes, the audience is mesmerised by her sexual power and spirited dancing.

Drums throbbed, hips swayed, the young men sighed. The girls who had been rejected as sintrens by Ki Jlonggrang smiled scornfully...

"It's crazy, that pock-marked Si Wuk, how come she's turned into a pretty girl?"

³⁸ Perguncingan di tengah himpitan penonton yang berjejal mulai merayap dari mulut-mulut beberapa gadis muda dusu Randu Alas. Agaknya mereka kesal dengan munculnya Si Wuk sebagai sintren yang dipilih oleh Ki Jlonggrang. Atas dasar apa Ki Jlonggrang memilih Si Wuk? Bukankah begitu banyak gadis-gadis lain yang ditolak oleh Ki Jlonggrang, padahal segala persyaratan yang diperlukan untuk menjadi sintren telah mereka miliki.

⁴⁰ Compare with similar animist beliefs in Dukuh Paruk in Tohari's trilogy.

⁴⁰ Mereka tinggal menunggu berapa lama sampai kurungan itu dibuka, menunggu masuknya roh sintren ke dalam tubuh Si Wuk. Ki Jlonggrang terus meliuk-liukkan tubuhnya, asap dupa bertabur di arena lapangan. Semua orang, tua muda, laki perempuan seperti disedot oleh kekuatan magis Ki Jlonggrang, yang pada mulutnya terus menggumamkan mantra-mantra, ia seperti tak peduli pada sekelilingnya. Ki Jlonggrang telah kuyup pada situasi trance.

"Hey, I want to marry Si Wuk!" someone shouted, and whoever he was, it was clear that he meant what he said. (*Sintren Randu Alas*: 13) ⁴¹

At the climax of the dance, an evil spirit apparently possesses Si Wuk. She runs amok, terrorising the village that has mocked her. The performance arena is in chaos, with men, women and children screaming and running for their lives to escape the enraged *sintren*, who, after wrecking her own house, attacks several villagers with a machete.

"Ki Jlonggrang, come on, put Si Wuk back in the cage!" A young man, puffing and panting, carried the cage to Ki Jlonggrang. He grabbed it, and chased after Si Wuk. And, while chanting mantras, he put the cage neatly over Si Wuk's head. She jerked and twitched for a moment, and uttered a strange scream. Ki Jlonggrang did not miss his chance. He lowered the cage until Si Wuk's whole body was inside. Several people near the incident rushed to help him. Then they banged on every percussion instrument they could find. One could see Ki Jlonggrang's lips moving silently. But it seemed that Si Wuk in her cage had already calmed down. (*Sintren Randu Alas*: 13) ⁴²

Poso's story is not a celebration of feminine power but a victory for the patriarchy. Female power in its destructive aspect has been unleashed briefly and then neutralised by the power of the shaman. The conventional view is that women, being closer to nature than men, may be used as channels for contacting spirit ancestors as well as being more vulnerable to the forces of evil. The possession of Si Wuk by the 'wrong' spirit could be interpreted as a warning about women's spiritual weakness. (It could also be a statement that the dukun has made the 'wrong' choice of *sintren*).

In the works by Mas Marco, Pramoedya and Umar Kayam, *ronggeng* performances highlight race, class, cultural and gender hierarchies, either between colonizing Dutch and *priyayi* (aristocratic) Indonesians, or between husband and wife.

⁴¹ Kendang menghentak, pinggul menggigal, desah suara para pemuda berbaur. Gadis-gadis yang ditampik oleh Ki Jlonggrang sebagai *sintren* mengulum senyum sinis... "Edan tenan, Si Wuk burik itu kok jadi putri cantik?" "Wah, aku mau jadi bojonya *sintren* Si Wuk!" ujar seseorang entah siapa tapi jelas suara itu diucapkan dengan sungguh-sungguh.

⁴² "Ki Jlonggrang ayo masukkan Si Wuk ke dalam kurungan ini!" Seorang pemuda nampak terengah-engah membawa kurungan itu kepada Ki Jlonggrang. Ki Jlonggrang cepat meraih kurungan itu dikejarnya Si Wuk. Dan sambil kembali mengucapkan rapalan-rapalan Ki Jlonggrang dengan sigap memasukkan kurungan itu ke kepala Si Wuk yang seketika meggelepar-gelepar, dan menjeritkan suara aneh. Ki Jlonggrang tidak membuang kesempatan. Kurungan itu dirapatkannya hingga seluruh tubuh Si Wuk masuk ke dalam kurungan. Beberapa orang di dekat kejadian itu segera membantu. Mereka kembali memukulkan segala tetabuhan yang ada. Ki Jlonggrang terlihat komat-kamit. Tapi nampak Si Wuk dalam kurungan itu sudah tenang kembali.

They depict *tayuban* / *ronggeng* performances in the secular context of official events during the colonial period, with the accompaniment of alcohol, gambling and erotic behaviour. The works by Tohari, Herliany and Poso are in addition coloured with ambivalence to the *tayuban* / *ronggeng* tradition, either from the point of view of one of the characters and / or in the wider context of modernization. In Tohari's trilogy and the story by Poso there are explicit descriptions of traditional communities centred on ancestor worship and rites of thanksgiving and purification, in which the *ronggeng* plays a central part. In all three works, the central feminine presence is displaced (or "rescued") at the end by a male. Rasus leaves to join the army and then reappears as the saviour of Srintil and their village; Ganif breaks off his relationship with Murti and marries; while Si Wuk is subordinated to the superior power of the *dukun* Ki Jlonggrang.

Hefner (1987: 92) notes that by 1985, more than half the 16 communities in two mountain sub-districts of East Java that five years previously had sponsored *bersih desa* (village purification) festivals, had either abolished *tayuban* or restricted it in some way, for example, by prohibiting the consumption of alcohol.⁴³ Hefner outlines the process of *tayuban*'s suppression as follows:

Even prior to Indonesian independence, Muslim reformists challenged the sacral pretensions of the dance, criticizing it as indecent and wasteful. As these criticisms intensified after independence, they were also politicized along party lines ... Nahdatul Ulama leaders pursued the anti-*tayuban* and anti-spirit cult campaign more vigorously. Meanwhile, the collapse of nationalist and left-wing ideologies effectively eliminated some of the most important defenders of spirit cults and, indirectly, *tayuban*... A new generation of village youth is sceptical of ancestral and spirit-cult beliefs which earlier provided a social idiom for village relations. (Hefner 1987: 92)

In an interview published in the cultural magazine *Kolong Budaya* (2001: 53) Tohari acknowledges the existence of the *ronggeng* cult as a rite of praise to the goddess of fertility at harvest time, as well as the non-commercial nature of these ceremonies. His own vision of a tolerant and inclusive Islam that embraces and nurtures existing cultural forms (Lysloff 2003a: xii) apparently balances the marginalization of the *ronggeng* tradition so definitively expressed in his novels. According to Lysloff (2003b: 460) Tohari has been the target of criticism in the Banyumas area, for the explicit depictions

⁴³ This period (1979 – 1985) coincides with the first publication of Tohari's trilogy in book form (1982 – 1986).

of sexuality in his novels, as well as his political views⁴⁴. Likewise, Lysloff found that some informants were reluctant to admit officially that rituals such as *bukak-klambu* had ever existed.⁴⁵ Therefore it can be surmised that the *ronggeng*, formerly a powerful symbol of sacral feminine power in agricultural communities in Java, has now become a source of shame and embarrassment to people in the Banyumas area.⁴⁶ As Cooper (2004: 549) concludes, 'Reinterpreted in a modernising and increasingly monotheistic milieu, what previously signified prosperity later signified backwardness'.

* * * *

In the next chapter I analyse literary works that deal with prostitution. Unlike *nyai*, *selir* and *ronggeng*, prostitutes have no indigenous antecedents. They are not "validated" by their attachment to the household of a foreign Tuan or the *keputren* of an indigenous court, nor do they have any sacral function in village society. Prostitution as the commoditization of sexual services was a western concept that undermined indigenous notions of the transfer of sexual favours as an expression of goodwill in the establishment of trading relationships. Prostitution was tolerated as 'the necessary evil'⁴⁷ in the Dutch VOC and colonial periods (reflected by a series of laws and regulations) and in Indonesia's post-independence era continues to be a source of ambivalence, especially in the reactionary sexual discourse that has emerged in post-Suharto Indonesia, leading to attacks on sex workers and the closing of several of Indonesia's long-standing brothel complexes.

⁴⁴ *The Dancer* (2003) includes material (dealing with the communist debacle of 1965) that was not published in the original Indonesian version. See Lysloff 2003b: 459. However, the combined volume published by Gramedia in 2003 still has omissions.

⁴⁵ Tohari (2001: 53, Interview in *Kolong Budaya*) confirms the existence of *bukak-klambu*

⁴⁶ See Lysloff 2003b: 460

⁴⁷ See Hesselink 1992: 206 – 207. The 'doctrine of the necessary evil' refers to a regulation to counteract the damaging results of prostitution introduced to the Indies in 1852. 'The supporters of regulated prostitution claimed that prostitution was necessary to enable men to satisfy their natural sexual appetite, the so-called doctrine of the necessary evil.'

CHAPTER 4

PROSTITUTION

SETTING THE SCENE

'The prostitute's primary offense is that she is polyandrous in a polygynous world. She is the actor in having multiple partners, yet patriarchal society defines her as shared by many, denying her agency... although to the abolitionists, she continues to be the chattel of one: the stereotyped "pimp" who "coerces" her to be available to the many'. (Priscilla Alexander 1997: 85)

Prostitution¹ in Indonesia had two origins: the feudal courts of the archipelago, and the slave trade. In both cases, as elsewhere in early modern Southeast Asia, (1500 - 1800) women were regarded as commodities to be accumulated and exchanged in the elite male quest for power (Jones et al, 1995: 29). The Javanese courts drew *selir* (minor wives) from specific regions; for example, Indramayu in West Java supplied the court of Cirebon with *selir*, and until today is well known as a source of prostitutes.²

In this chapter I give a broad overview of sexual transactions between indigenous women and foreign men in Southeast Asia from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century, drawing mainly on historical studies by Anthony Reid and Barbara Watson Andaya. I then outline the establishment of commercialized prostitution in Java over 400 years, beginning with the existence of brothels outside the walls of Batavia castle from the early seventeenth century, to the establishment in the twentieth century of prostitution complexes in urban centres. I end this historical survey with a discussion of the reactionary discourses that run parallel with a more nuanced perception of prostitution as a viable profession in late New Order and Reformasi Indonesia. In the second part of this chapter I analyse selected works of literature from the 1920s to 2004 that feature prostitutes, embedding my discussion in Rebecca Surtees' (2004) division of prostitutes into "traditional" and "emergent" types. In my analysis of the literary texts, I focus on the following themes: the image of the prostitute and entry to sex work; confrontation / intervention; moralizing; agency and outcomes.

¹ 'Sex work' is a modern term coined in San Francisco in 1979/80. See Carol Leigh, "Inventing Sex work", in Jill Nagle (ed) *Whores and Other Feminists*, 1997: 225 - 231. To avoid anachronism, I have decided to use the terms 'prostitution / prostitutes' for the earlier period covered by this chapter. In addition, sex work encompasses a wider spectrum of activities than what is understood as "prostitution".

² Rukmana, N. 2001, "Indramayu, supplier of sex workers", *Jakarta Post*, 5 November

Prostitution as commercial transaction began to appear in the major cities of Southeast Asia in the late sixteenth century, and 'in every case it was slave women belonging to the kings or nobles who were so used' (Reid 1998: 633). Slavery by capture in Southeast Asia was often brutal and exploitative; Snouk Hurgronie wrote of nineteenth century Aceh, 'it is everywhere thought natural and permissible for all who acquire slaves at once to violate their female captives.' (Cited in Matheson and Hooker 1983: 198)

In the case of female slavery, however, the term 'prostitution' becomes problematic, at least in the early period of indigenous/European contact (late thirteenth to late sixteenth centuries). This was especially so before the establishment of a monetary exchange system, as sexual services were exchanged, not for cash, but to establish mutual trust between trading partners. 'The use of palace women in the Malay world to bestow favours and mutual ties of obligation with those outside it was often misunderstood as prostitution by Europeans' (Reid 2000: 206). The use of the term 'slavery' is equally problematic, as is the establishing of a sequential time frame in an extensive region where first European contact occurred over a long period of time. Therefore it is necessary at this point to provide a general outline of sexual transactions in the Early Modern period (1500 - 1800) in Southeast Asia, giving examples from the archipelago where appropriate.

Until the late sixteenth / early seventeenth century, the 'pattern of pre-marital sexual activity and easy divorce, together with the commercial element potentially involved in the paying of bride-wealth, ensured that temporary marriage or concubinage rather than prostitution became the dominant means of coping with the vast annual influx of foreign traders to the major ports.' (Reid 1998: 632) To cite one example, François Martin, a Breton merchant visiting Aceh in 1602, interpreted the pattern of pre-marital freedom as follows:

When strangers come to this place, they buy women for as much time as they want to stay there, without the women being shocked by this... Before getting married the girls do not scruple to prostitute themselves to anyone they consider suitable, which in no way prevents them from marrying. (Translation cited in Reid 1995: 58) ³

In her seminal article "From temporary wife to prostitute" Andaya (1998: 11 - 24) analyses changing attitudes towards sexual relations between foreign men and

³ François Martin, *Description du premier voyage fait aux Indes Orientales par les François en l'an 1603*, Laurens Sonnius, Paris, 1604. Translated by Helen Reid.

indigenous women in Southeast Asia. She argues that 'by the time of the first European arrivals in Southeast Asia, a continuum that linked hospitality, sex and gifts was already well established'. Factors that were crucial in changing these attitudes included the rise of patriarchal states, adoption of elite values, an increase in the number of foreign males, the expansion of urban centres, and especially 'the increasing penetration of a monetized economy'. Andaya argues that for local women, money received even for casual sexual services was regarded as an indication of a continuing relationship, while on the other hand Europeans 'tended to place money in an economic sphere where interactions were inherently impersonal, transitory, amoral and calculating' (idem).⁴

Andaya (1993b: 57) describes the situation in Jambi (Sumatra) in the seventeenth century: 'In an environment that established trade itself as enhanced reciprocity, the ruler and the women attached to the court could play a critical role in the acceptance of strangers as trusted merchants'. The so-called 'whoredom' that some VOC representatives observed, 'was in many cases a manifestation of the sexual reciprocity deeply embedded in indigenous economics.'

English and Dutch officials usually treated the slave girls and concubines sent as royal gifts simply as prostitutes, and therefore these transactions tended to engender animosity rather than harmony. From 1615 the situation began to change, and 'the new commercial associations were represented not by wives and children but by the display of exotic European gifts'. (Andaya 1993b: 63)

As Reid (1983a: xv) points out, the Western scholar needs to exercise caution in defining slavery. The pre-existing system of debt-bondage and fealty in the Indonesian courts encompassed a variety of hierarchical arrangements, including not only wives and concubines, but also hundreds of palace retainers, both male and female, with various duties, as well as bondsmen who worked the land outside the palace walls. It was considered an honour for women to enter palace service, and the opportunities for upward mobility were far greater for bonded women than men. (Reid 2000: 206)

In the courts, female slaves from other parts of the Archipelago, or even further abroad, were greatly prized for their exotic qualities. It is reported that the fifth Sultan of Yogyakarta instructed one of his palace retainers (attending the Great Exhibition in Paris in 1889) to bring him back two *demi-mondaines* (fashionable prostitutes) from Paris,

⁴ The version of Andaya's article I accessed is an online document with no pagination.

though there is no evidence that this request was fulfilled. (Carey & Houben 1992: 36 n.22)

Reid delineates a Southeast Asian mode of 'slavery' in which debt is the major determinant, thus removing slavery from specific moral associations. Vertical bonding is central to almost all Southeast Asian societies, which Reid explains as 'having their origin in a characteristically Southeast Asian acceptance of mutual obligation between high and low, or creditor and debtor'. (Reid 2000: 188)

Bruno Lasker's *Human Bondage in Southeast Asia* (1950)⁵ was a watershed publication which 'marked the end of a period in which [slavery] was approached in the spirit of crusade against scandalous abuses. Such moralizing by outsiders began to seem out of place in the era of political independence, and the word "slavery" became difficult to use without creating misunderstandings'. Reid (1983a: xv)

I have decided to follow Reid's lead for the earlier period covered by this chapter, by accepting the term 'slavery' (in spite of its pejorative associations) to describe all relationships based on unequal power dynamics if they also include the persons-as-chattel element. This is in order to maintain my focus on women, rather than to get caught up in terminology, which would mean exchanging 'a category with difficult boundaries for a category so broad as to be almost meaningless'. (Reid 2000: 181) Given that the 'crusading spirit' typical of colonial texts implies criticism of the abuse of subject peoples, one should remember that many of the categories defined as 'slavery' were already in place before European contact, and that Europeans to some extent appropriated and exploited 'the established systems of slavery... where it was customary for subjects to enter slavery through sale by rulers, debt, punishment, capture during war and by piracy and raiding' (Abeyasekere 1983b: 291 - 292).

Slaves To European And Chinese Men

Female slaves in the households of Europeans were responsible for domestic service and entertainment, and to display the owner's prosperity. The domestic and sexual services provided by female slaves do not appear to be very different from those provided by *nyai* (housekeeper-concubines) to the VOC civil service and foreign planters. (Reid 2000: 206)

⁵ Bruno Lasker 1950, *Human Bondage in Southeast Asia*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut (Reprinted 1972)

Initially the Dutch bought slaves from India, Madagascar or New Guinea, but eventually (by the 1660s) they were relying on indigenous imports from mainly non-Islamic parts of the archipelago, such as Celebes (Sulawesi), Bali and Nias.

The population of single men in the port cities, particularly the large-scale immigration of Chinese from the early seventeenth century, was accommodated by the buying or hiring of a bonded woman, who often served as domestic and commercial assistant as well as sexual partner. Scott reported of the Chinese in Banten, Java, in 1606:

Their manner at Bantam is to buy women slaves (for they bring no women out of China) by whom they have many children. And when they return to their owne countrey... they sell their women, but their children they carry with them. (Cited in Reid 2000: 206-7)

The growing importance of concubinage by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is reflected in the relative prices paid for female slaves, rising to two or three times that paid for males, the highest prices being paid by Europeans. Prices could reach over twenty times the normal male price, for example, for 'a Nias maid, when all her points are good'. (Reid 2000: 207)

Batavia was dominant as a slave-importing centre by the end of the eighteenth century, and the trade in slaves (as with other important resources) was monopolized by the VOC and its officials. However, a decline in the numbers of slaves in the late eighteenth century may be attributed to the 'waning fortunes of the Dutch East India Company' (Abeyasekere 1983: 295), and was further undermined by the campaigns of Raffles to eradicate slavery during the British interregnum of 1811-1816. The English hired free domestic servants, and in 1812 Raffles prohibited the importation of slaves to Batavia, also requiring that all slaves be registered. Upon their return to Java in 1815 the Dutch 'prudently upheld Raffles' prohibition'. (Van der Kraan 1983: 331)

In 1818 the slave trade was abolished (or became clandestine) (Sutherland 1983: 272) and in 1819 it was again decreed that all slaves in the Indies should be registered, although the Dutch colonial government exercised some caution in the case of native-owned slaves. Batavia, however, remained officially anti-abolition until 1864.

Domestic slavery was officially abolished in 1860, but it has been argued that 'domestic servants merely exchanged slavery for debt-bondage, since by judicious use of advance

payments employers got their servants so heavily into debt that they were bound to them indefinitely.' (Abeyasekere 1983: 310)

To sum up, the attitudes of Europeans in Southeast Asia during the Early Modern period (1500 – 1800) were based on a series of cross-cultural misunderstandings. On the one hand, they misinterpreted the sexual role of Asian women in establishing reciprocity and trust as 'prostitution'. On the other hand, nineteenth century European administrators and missionaries brought with them the idea of slavery 'as 'not only evil, unchristian and malevolent, but also... as contrary to the natural and original state of man' (Reid 2000: 185). For more than three hundred years the borderlines between slavery and concubinage, and between concubinage and prostitution remained blurred. However, prostitution, in the sense of a non-domiciliary transaction involving the impersonal exchange of sex for money, existed from the beginnings of VOC settlement in Batavia in the early seventeenth century. According to Blussé (1986: 168 – 169) brothels flourished in the newly established town of Batavia; 'they were mainly located in front of Batavia castle, a location which allowed soldiers who could not bring women into the barracks to pay occasional visits to the ladies of pleasure.'

PROSTITUTION

During the VOC and Dutch colonial periods, attempts to regulate prostitution (initially conflated with any sexual liaison out of wedlock) were expressed in a series of laws and ordinances, all more or less ineffective.

The first, in 1620, denounced the 'dishonourable unions, detestable concubinage, and God-offending adultery that is practised not only among Christians with Christians, Moors with Moors and Heathens with Heathens but also perversely without respect or exception of persons, religion or sect between Christians, Moors and Heathens as if such were permissible and lawful marriages.' (Fox 1983: 255)

The ordinance of December 1620 prescribed severe penalties to check these practices, forbidding anyone residing within the jurisdiction of Batavia 'from keeping a female slaves or slaves, concubine or concubines in his house and dwelling place or elsewhere.' (idem) However, by 1633 when plans to provide Batavia with Dutch women were abandoned, the VOC began to encourage interracial marriages and 'turned a blind eye to irregular unions, not only among the Chinese but also among its own officers and the freeburghers of the town.' (idem)

The 1620 ordinances were followed in 1650 by the establishment of a 'House of Correction' in Batavia to reform prostitutes. However, a regulation of 1766, which forbade prostitutes from entering the wharves without permission (Lim 1998: 30) was evidence of continuing tolerance of commercial sex.

In 1852 the colonial government introduced a law that remains basically intact to the present: 'public women' were to be registered and under the supervision of the police and were to have regular medical checks for disease. Prostitutes were encouraged to operate in brothels, though a further regulation in 1858 emphasized that the 1852 Act was not to be interpreted as legitimising brothels, but rather to 'limit the harmful effects' of prostitution (Jones et al. 1995: 3).

In 1874, responsibility for prostitution was shifted to regional governments. In Surabaya, for example, the Resident established three brothel *kampung* (precursors of the twentieth century *lokalisasi*) and prostitutes were not permitted to operate outside these areas. By the mid nineteenth century, especially after the abolition of slavery in 1860, prostitution became more widespread. This took two forms: organized prostitution in the major ports and cities, as well as on plantations and in military barracks, and private arrangements with *nyai* or housekeeper-concubines, usually in the service of Europeans and wealthy Chinese.

Another reason for the dramatic increase in prostitution in the nineteenth century was the opening up of the colonial economy to private enterprise. Large numbers of male workers, as well as managers from Holland, migrated to the plantation developments of Java and the east coast of Sumatra, as well as to the building of new transportation systems to service these areas. (Jones et al: 3 – 4)

Surabaya in particular was a notorious centre of prostitution, being a major focus for trade, with a port, railway terminus, naval base and garrison. By 1864 there were 18 official brothels in Surabaya as well as sex workers operating from small cafes near the harbour, and on the streets. There were Chinese- and Japanese-owned brothels in the centre of the city, and native female servants and housebound Dutch women provided other, more discreet sexual services (Jones et al: 4). Until 1890, half the European men in the colony were living with native concubines. After that date, the declining acceptability of concubinage led to a greater recourse to prostitution (at least for

unmarried men from Holland), as an alternative to the arrangements with *nyai*, or indigenous housekeepers. (Ming 1983: 70).

Dutch tolerance of both prostitution and concubinage was based on three basic assumptions. The first was a conviction that male sexual appetite was insatiable and needed an outlet (Hesselink 1992: 208), the second, the deleterious effect of the tropical climate which had the effect of eroding the self-control of even the most staunch Calvinist, and the third, the 'loose morals' of Asian women (Hesselink 1992: 208, 213). These three factors became a potent justification for the 'necessary evil', just as Dutch engagement in the slave trade had been excused where there had been 'good and sufficient cause'.

The Twentieth Century

In 1911, the 'model' of regulation ended, as there were insufficient resources or medical practitioners to enforce medical checks or to treat venereal diseases. The 'public morality laws' enacted in Holland in 1910 and in the Indies in 1913 were also ineffective, as they made activities by third parties (those profiting from prostitution, such as brothel owners and pimps) illegal, but ignored the prostitutes and clients themselves.

The Japanese occupation of Indonesia from 1942 to 1945 entrenched the commercialisation of sex. The ideology of 'obligatory service' to the state included the recruitment of women to provide sexual services for the Japanese Army.

Lucas (1992: 72) notes that the Japanese military 'brought geishas to some areas to work in restaurants, but the majority of prostitutes in the Occupation were Indonesian, Chinese, Eurasian or Dutch.' This, however, did not include the 'legalised military rape of subject women on a scale – and over a period of time -- previously unknown in history' (Lucas 1992: 73), the *jugun ianfu*, or comfort women, recruited by trickery, coercion or abduction to work in military brothels.⁶ 'On the pretext of various kinds of employment or even further education, young women left home for attractive sounding new jobs, only to find themselves in brothel prisons working as sex slaves for the Japanese.' (Lucas 1992: 53)

From the 1950s to the 1970s, poverty and underemployment in rural areas was one cause of female migration to the towns and cities, where prostitution was one of several options

⁶ A similar situation is described in detail in Eka Kurniawan's novel *Cantik itu Luka* (2004) analyzed below. A group of Dutch and Eurasian girls are taken from a prisoner-of-war camp to serve in a Japanese military brothel.

for unskilled women to make a living. Low wages in the formal sector made prostitution a more lucrative alternative than small trading or domestic service. The greater mobility of Indonesia's working population provided increased opportunities for commercial sex workers, especially at railway stations, military bases, and mining and timber camps. (Jones et al: 8 – 10)

From the 1960s a new phenomenon appeared in the prostitution industry: brothel complexes or *lokalisasi*. The pioneer of this development was the village of Silir in Surakarta, which was exempted from a 1953 regulation forbidding prostitution. Silir set the pattern for the establishment of *lokalisasi* in the larger cities, catering for a mainly Indonesian clientele: Dolly-Jarak (Surabaya, 1960s),⁷ Kramat-Tunggak, (Jakarta, 1970) and Sunan-Kuning (Semarang). Some of the complexes, for example Kramat-Tunggak in Jakarta, were economic initiatives by the local authorities, which both legalized and taxed this complex (Jones et al: 13 - 15).

One objective of the *lokalisasi* was that of regulating prostitution, including the relocation of existing brothels to specific areas where they would be under the control of local authorities such as military police and social services. The second objective, of rehabilitating prostitutes by returning them to the community has met with limited success, one major factor being the poor wages available in alternative occupations. In addition, even today there are many advantages for both sex workers and pimps in operating within the *lokalisasi* context, including security from prosecution. Jones et al (1995: 17) also point out that the state, as covert manager of these brothels, gained substantial revenue from the complexes, which would disappear if the objective of rehabilitation were to be achieved.

Rebecca Surtees (2005: 1) deconstructs the dominant assumption that in present-day Indonesia 'sex work is the exclusive domain of the impoverished, rural dweller who enters sex work only when deceived or forced by circumstance.' In a more nuanced discussion of the sex industry in urban Indonesia, she divides contemporary sex work into two categories: 'traditional' and 'emergent', and discusses issues such as education and class, entry into the sex industry and rationale for entry, suggesting that the degrees of agency and choice for most sex workers may vary considerably, depending on their circumstances.

⁷ See Purnomo & Siregar 1983, for a detailed account of the history of the Dolly-Jarak complex in Surabaya.

The 'traditional' type of sex work is manifested most prominently by the *lokalisasi*, or official brothel complexes, which were formerly managed by the Department of Social Affairs (Dinas Sosial)⁸ as well as unofficial brothels (*rumah bordil*) operating with the tacit approval of local governments. Freelance sex workers also seek customers through hotels and entertainment venues such as discos, nightclubs and karaoke bars. At the lowest end of the social scale there are prostitutes who operate out of cemeteries, railway yards and parks. (Surtees 2005: 3 – 5) As well as these more visible forms of prostitution, Surtees categorizes 'indirect' and 'part-time' sex workers: tea sellers,⁹ waitresses in snack bars and *warungs* (cafés) workers in massage parlours and beauty salons, and 'contract wives'. (Surtees 2005: 5 – 9)¹⁰

On the other hand, 'emergent' sex work in the urban milieu involves middle to upper class women, often with a higher standard of education and 'a menu of viable economic options', whose voluntary entry to the sex industry is based on the desire for a more affluent lifestyle rather than basic material survival. As Surtees points out, their entry demonstrates a high degree of agency, and is in contradiction to mainstream sexual discourse. (Surtees, 2005: 10 - 18)

Previous studies of prostitution in Indonesia include Yuyu Krisna's *Menyusuri Remang-Remang Jakarta* (1978), a study of independent sex workers in Jakarta, and Purnomo and Siregar's study of the Dolly complex in Surabaya (1983). Alison Murray's *No Money, No Honey* (1991), is a detailed sociological study of street traders and prostitutes in Jakarta in the late 1980s. The journalist Moammar Emka in his book *Sex 'n the City: Jakarta Undercover* (2003) describes the pastimes and pleasures of rich young men in Jakarta in the early twenty-first century. The author conducted his research during sex jaunts to exclusive clubs where membership alone costs millions of rupiah, and millions more change hands at each event. Emka's book is anecdotal rather than analytical, and written from the male consumer's point of view. He several times uses the term '*mencari mangsa*' (looking for prey),¹¹ thus re-inscribing the image of the prostitute as aggressive and predatory and the client as unfortunate victim.

⁸ The Department of Social Affairs was dissolved during Abdurrahman Wahid's presidency. This also had a negative impact on the rehabilitation programs. See Yamin, *Asia Times Online*, 24 December 1999.

⁹ Tea or drinks sellers receive a monthly salary and commission on the sales of drinks. They sometimes (but not always) receive an additional fee for sexual services.

¹⁰ 'Indirect' sex workers are women that are available for sexual transactions in addition to their usual duties.

¹¹ Mas Marco also used this expression in his short stories of Surabaya and Semarang written in the 1920s.

Indonesia remains the only Southeast Asian country with a quasi-legal prostitution system.¹² Streetwalkers continue to be targeted under regulations that prohibit soliciting and loitering, often by 'raids'. Local authorities target the streetwalkers, but generally not their clients, or prostitutes who work behind closed doors. Surtees (2005: f/n 4) mentions recent draft legislation that proposes to criminalize sex work only in the case of solicitation in public spaces.

Since 1998 there has been opposition to prostitution establishments by community and religious groups, indicating a reactionary backlash against perceived immorality, for example the closing down of the Kramat-Tunggak *lokalisasi* in Jakarta and the burning of brothels in Tangerang and Bekasi in December 1999, and the attacks on sex workers in Jalan Jaksa in Jakarta in 2002. Further attacks on cafes in South Sulawesi and Bogor in 2004 were explained as acts of jihad (holy war) against sinful activities such as prostitution.¹³ According to Surtees (2005: 54) 'this reactionary sexual discourse is emerging alongside and in contrast to the liberalising of sexual discourse... in which sex work is increasingly tenable, albeit not desirable'. At the time of writing (February 2007) the Kramat-Tunggak complex remains closed, but another major *lokalisasi* in Jakarta, Mangga Besar, (although not legal) remains in operation, as does the largest complex in Indonesia, Dolly-Jarak in Surabaya, which still has legal status. Thus decisions about prostitution establishments still rest with regional authorities, though from the above discussion it is evident that they can be influenced by local pressure groups on moral grounds.

PROSTITUTES IN LITERATURE

There is a tendency in literary works about prostitutes (especially by male authors) to explain away their deviance from the 'good path' (monogamous marriage and motherhood) by poverty, lack of education, the absence of moral / religious principles, an unfortunate background, and so on. If there are 'extenuating circumstances' for their entry to the world of prostitution it is usually the necessity of supporting their families. Another tendency by authors writing about prostitutes is the mission to 'redeem' them, to bring them back to the 'good path'. However, positive outcomes are rare, and the miseries encountered by the female prostitute are apparently an overt method of moralizing-through-punishment. Thus the issue of prostitution is diagnosed as

¹² Surtees 2005: f/n 4: 'While no law prohibits sex work in Indonesia, neither does one permit it'.

¹³ See Surtees 2005: 54, and f/n 5, 79, 80, and Kafil Yamin 1999, "Jakarta's brothel closedown sends industry underground", *Asia Times Online*, 24 December 1999.

resulting from a lack of choice, and prostitutes are usually represented as powerless victims on the margins of a capitalist society.

My analysis of selected works of Indonesian literature focuses on specific themes: the image of the prostitute and the reasons for her entry to the sex industry (either forced or voluntary); intervention by, and / or confrontation with, the patriarchy (pimps, brothel keepers, government agencies, wives); moralizing by the author / narrator / protagonists / readers; and finally, agency and outcomes. With these themes in mind, I analyze three stories by Mas Marco Kartodikromo (1920s); the novel *Belenggu* by Armijn Pane (1940); “Oleng-Kemoleng” (Swaying), a short story by Gerson Poyk (1968); expatriate novelist Dewi Anggraeni’s first novel, *The Root of All Evil* (1987); and a short story, “Antara riak dan ombak” by Rayani Sriwidodo (1994). Finally, I turn to two novels from the twenty-first century: *Supernova*, by Dewi Lestari (2001); and *Cantik itu Luka*, by Eka Kurniawan (2004).

In these literary texts there are examples both of ‘traditional’ and ‘emergent’ prostitution. The last two novels deconstruct the image of the prostitute-as-victim and endow the protagonists with a degree of social agency and subjectivity not evident in the earlier texts. As Surtees (2005: 23) concludes: ‘[I]n situations where the woman engages in sex work to meet economic need and socially prescribed obligations, there is an indication that this behaviour is forgivable. But where the choice is largely unconstrained, to enter sex work is a bold and radical choice.’ Therefore issues of agency (in the form of free choice to enter the sex industry and the freedom to leave) and resistance (the ability to make significant choices within the sex industry or, alternatively, to escape them altogether) are crucial to the narratives I analyse here. Alexander (1987: 93) emphasizes that ‘Although the context of prostitution differs from one place to another, prostitute activists everywhere are adamant about distinguishing *forced* from *voluntary* prostitution...’ In the case of Indonesia, Surtees (2005: 21 – 23) suggests that the entry of women into ‘traditional’ forms of sex work is for the most part voluntary, although heavily influenced by economic and social constraints. She identifies three modes of entry: Bonded entry (a payment is made to parents, spouse, guardians or brokers); involuntarily (by coercion, deception or abduction); and voluntary choice.

Images of the prostitute / Entry to the sex industry

In the three stories by Mas Marco Kartodikromo set in the urban milieu of Semarang and Surabaya in the 1920s, the author is very specific about the rationale for their entry:

'First and foremost it is poverty!' (Kartodikromo 1981: 10)¹⁴ The narrator in "Black Semarang" includes in his categories of people in jail, 'people who had always been deprived of any moral or spiritual training, like those born in brothels... from an early age they witness prostitution, violence, foul language and all those things which characterize a brothel, so that such things become a kind of 'education' for them and they are happy to do low and depraved things.' (Kartodikromo 1981: 12) The most detailed portrait of a prostitute occurs in Marco's story "Images of Extravagance". The male protagonist meets a young woman at an opera house,¹⁵ where her agenda soon becomes obvious to the reader. Her outwardly polite, demure behaviour, as well as her clothing is described in great detail: 'an embroidered white *kebaya*, and a Pekalongan batik sarung by Van Zuylen, as well as black sandals and a purple silk shawl about her neck... Anybody would have found her attractive. (Kartodikromo 1981: 14). Atimah's character is represented as manipulative and predatory, and she appears to be an autonomous agent in her profession of 'attracting victims'.

From when she had left her home it was her intention to catch a suitable victim at the theatre... Atimah, the seductress was good at capturing the hearts of young men with all manner of ruse, even though in her heart there was nothing but venom. (Kartodikromo 1981: 15 - 17)

Gerson Poyk's short story "Swaying"¹⁶ concerns the 'crab barber', an amputee. He and his sadistic friend are keeping a girl from the village, described as their 'capital', an 'investment' and a 'sideline'. Like Mas Marco's urban prostitutes, the reason for her being there is poverty. She has no choice in the matter; this is a clear case of forced or involuntary entry to prostitution. She is a chattel, totally under the control of the two men. The barber explains to his guest how they acquired their 'investment':

It was fate that she fell into our hands. Her village is well known for its rice production, but the farmers who are desperate for cash in hand sell the rice for a cheap price before it is ripe. Straight after the harvest the mature rice is taken away by the people who bought it to sell for a big profit and the farmers are left with nothing. Her parents lived under the

¹⁴ The English translations of Mas Marco's stories are by Paul Tickell. I have been unable to access the original Indonesian texts

¹⁵ Note the link between public entertainment venues and prostitution.

¹⁶ Original text: 'Oleng-Kemoleng' *Horison* 7:3, 1968: 200 - 201; 223). The English translation (by Jan Lingard) is taken from David Hill, 1998, *Beyond the Horizon: Short Stories from Contemporary Indonesia*, 3-8.

pressures of this system, so after they'd sold all their possessions to buy rice for themselves, they finally had to sell their own daughter. (Poyk 1988: 6-7 / 1968: 201)¹⁷

Also at the bottom end of the economic scale (although apparently an independent agent) is Dumina, the protagonist of Rayani Sriwidodo's story "Antara Riak dan Ombak" (Between the Ripples and the Waves, 1994)¹⁸, who earns her living as a prostitute on a beach. Dumina fits the profile of 'indirect' sex worker, as it is implied that she has a regular job as a housemaid, and 'moonlights' as a prostitute. The title refers to her transformation each time she crosses an iron bridge, the border between the outside world and her profession.

This was the boundary between the ripples and the waves. An iron bridge, very cold at night, but scorching hot in the searing rays of the sun. Dumina was aware of this boundary each time she crossed the bridge, approaching the arena. (Sriwidodo 1994: 22)¹⁹

In the public toilets, Dumina sheds the clothes that she has worn on the bus, simple garments and rubber sandals that are the 'uniform' of a household servant. With a pair of high-heeled shoes and fancy clothes in the latest fashion, make-up and perfume, she is transformed to a prostitute. During the story the reader learns her reason for needing to supplement her income: she is responsible for contributing to the support of her family in the village.

Perhaps the most controversial and complex portrayal of a prostitute before Indonesian independence is Rohaya in Armijn Pane's *Belenggu* (Shackles) frequently described as Indonesia's first genuinely modern novel.²⁰ The story centres on a love triangle, the protagonists of which are a modern urban couple Doctor Sukartono and his wife Sumartini, who live in Batavia. 'The other woman' is Rohayah (Yah), who is a prostitute

¹⁷ Dia sampai ketangan kami karena nasib. Desanja terkenal sebagai pengasil beras, tetapi begitu habis panen, begitu habis mereka. Orang tuanja hidup dibawah tekanan idjon sehingga setelah habis mendjual barang untuk dibelikan beras, achirnja harus mendjual anaknja.

¹⁸ From Rayani Sriwidodo's collection of stories, *Balada Satu Kuntum* (Ballad of a Blossom) 1994. The collection contains several stories about sex workers. English translations are the present writer's.

¹⁹ Itulah batas antara riak dan ombak. Sebuah jembatan yang rangka besinya begitu dingin di malam hari, aduhai panas di bawah terik matahari. Dumina siap menyadari batas ini tiap menyeberangi jembatan itu, menuju arena.

²⁰ Author: Armijn Pane, (1908 - 1970). For references to Indonesian and Western commentaries on *Belenggu*, see Frederick, 1988: ix, n. 2 & 4. English translations are by John H. McGlynn, from Armijn Pane, *Shackles*, Lontar Foundation, 1988

and *keroncong* singer. For most of the novel she and Tono have an extra-marital affair, until all three characters separate to pursue their own uncertain futures.

Yah's entry to prostitution is complex, but for the most part voluntary. Her profession as a *keroncong* singer is also socially stigmatized, just as the profession of *ronggeng* (ritual dancer: see Chapter 3) is closely linked with sexual availability.

W. H. Frederick (1998: xi - xii) in his introduction to the English translation of *Belenggu*, speaks of the contradictions and ironies of the novel, in particular the depiction of Yah. These ironies include the ability of Yah to embody (or parody) the image of a faithful, attentive, supportive wife; the very role that Tono's wife Tini is struggling to escape from. In this regard Yah subverts the conventional image of prostitute as amoral.

... Yah possesses both wisdom and humanity despite her life in prostitution and popular music; she appears in many ways to fit the model of a 'traditional' woman despite her having been 'corrupted' by the worst side of modern, urban life...

Rohayah eludes definition; for Doctor Sukartono she is in turn his medical patient Mrs Eni, his childhood sweetheart Rohayah, the companion / mistress who provides him with wifely attentions, and finally the popular *keroncong* singer Siti Hayati. She reveals her past to her lover, with the inference that it is impossible for her to ever lead a 'normal' life.

Rohayah gazed at the road she had travelled; the pitted and muddied road faced by hotels on either side and inside every hotel room an endless hall of numbered doorways and a woman in each of the rooms, all of them women like herself... (Shackles: 114 / *Belenggu*: 135 - 136) ²¹

Yet Yah herself has agency in these dissimulations. In her youth she ran away from an arranged marriage to a much older man, choosing a life of wandering rather than stability, moving from hotel to hotel and city to city. After three years living with a Dutchman in the Garut area she finally settled in Jakarta. There have been many men in her life, and she is scornful of men's infatuations with her. In short, she is in control of her sexual liaisons. She is pragmatic, knowing that her love affair with Tono will also be of limited duration. Yah assumes new identities with ease:

²¹ Dihadapan mata semangat Rohaya memandang jalan yang sudah ditempuhnya, berlumpur-lumpur, hotel, ke hotel, kamar kecil-kecil semuanya bernomor, kerap kali sejejer dengan kamar perempuan lain-lain seperti dia juga...

There have been times when even I have forgotten who I am and what my real name is. With each hotel I entered I took a new name. Even if I had been in a hotel once before I still gave myself a different name. You see, a name is like a postage stamp. Once it's been used, who will buy it again? For the customer the name alone holds importance. If the name is new the merchandise will seem new as well. (Shackles: 32 / Belenggu: 47)²²

The most significant theme in Dewi Anggraeni's novel, *The Root of all Evil* ²³ highlights the story of Tati, a hostess / call girl at a Jakarta nightclub. Tati's entry to prostitution is as follows: She is a widow from a village, with two young children, and has followed her brother to Jakarta in the hope of finding work. After being 'taken up' by one of the bosses in the nightclub world, she then becomes his mistress, and is set up in a comfortable bungalow, with all the trappings of the material world. The author / narrator's ²⁴ perceptions of Tati are that she has intelligence as well as beauty. She has graduated from senior high school and had ambitions to become a lawyer, but married young. At thirty, Tati feels it is 'too late' for her to go back to school and gain an education in order to make a fresh start. Thus her entry to the sex industry is voluntary, but constrained by the need to support her children. Tati's position is halfway between sex worker and wife: she is linked with the world of entertainment as a hostess but has 'graduated' to the precarious position of mistress. Thus she occupies a liminal position.

Confrontation / Intervention

One of the most significant events in *Belenggu*, as Hellwig was the first to point out, is the meeting of Tini and Yah. Tini has a certain tolerance about her husband straying, but does not approve of his choice of mistress. She decides to confront her:

So it was that three days later the news reached Tini that Tono was seeing Siti Hayati, a *kroncong* singer, who lived in Taman Sari. That had to be the woman, Tini was sure of it. It couldn't be any other. But a singer? Men are prone to infatuation, but why a *kroncong* singer? How could Tono fall for that kind of woman, a cheap performer? A woman like that!²⁵ (Shackles: 109 / Belenggu: 129 - 130) ²⁶

²² "Sedang aku lupa akan diriku [...] Kadang-kadang lupa aku siapa namaku sebenarnya, karena kerap kali berganti nama. Kalau pindah ke hotel lain, namakukupun lain. Meskipun hotel itu sudah kutumpangi dahulu, namaku kuganti juga. Sebab kalau nama itu juga didengar orang, kata orang [...] barang tua. Nama saja yang ditilik orang, karena namanya baru didengar, barangnyapun baru dalam angan-anganya.

²³ *The Root of All Evil* is written in English.

²⁴ The narrator is Komala, an expatriate Indonesian writer who is visiting family in Jakarta; she becomes involved in the story because Tati's brother Hamadi is living in her mother's house. The character of Komala has some parallels with the biography of the author.

²⁵ Note the association between the stigmatization of performers and prostitution

To Tini's surprise, Yah is neatly dressed, beautiful and well mannered, and handles the encounter with confidence.

'Tini had not imagined a confrontation like this. She had been prepared to meet a common sort of woman, a woman she could get the better of on the strength of her spirit alone, the spirit of an educated woman, a woman of the respected class... Her curiosity grew. 'Who are you, really?' Tini asked, nodding her head in Yah's direction.' (Shackles: 110 / Belenggu: 131) ²⁷

Ironically, Yah delivers some sisterly advice on the qualities of a good wife: 'If you could change and be a good wife, you could make him happy. Your home would be a place where he could find his needed peace and calm. Men... they're all the same.' (Shackles: 112) Tini responds by suggesting that it is Yah who should be Tono's wife and 'take care of him' (a solution that would allow Tini to lead her own life, free of guilt). As Hellwig concludes:

[Tono] has no control over the meeting of 'his' two women, over an arrangement they make without his knowledge, and – what is worse – over the feeling of female solidarity which eliminates him as a man (lover/husband). Tono ends up as the loser, unable to change Tini and Yah's decision to leave him. (Hellwig 1994: 36)

Not only do the two women not compete for Tono, they decline to give up their autonomy to support him. Neither Yah nor Tini fits the conventional image of wife or prostitute: Yah is capable for a time of fulfilling the traditional role of a loving, attentive wife, the very role that Tini is rebelling against.

In *The Root of all Evil*, there is also a crucial confrontation between wife and mistress. The boss's wife appears at the nightclub, and throws sulfuric acid over Tati, scarring her for life and blinding her. This ends her life of luxury and ruins her only capital – her looks. The novel includes a subtext, concerning the sources of female power. The Boss believes that he has a supernatural power that derives from sleeping with virgins, and it

²⁶ Demikianlah tiga hari kemudian, sampai ke telinga Tini cerita tentang Tono ke rumah Siti Hayati, penyanyi keroncong, di Taman Sari. Itu dia, tidak lain lagi. Ah, dia cinta pada penyanyi keroncong! Laki-laki memang cinta sebarang cinta saja. Masakan Tini kalah kepada penyanyi keroncong! Perempuan [...] orang begitu saja!

²⁷ Tadinya dalam angan-angan Tini dia akan berjumpa dengan perempuan biasa, perempuan yang dapat dikalahkannya dengan semangat saja, semangatnya sebagai perempuan yang berpelajaran, perempuan dari tingkatan baik-baik... Nafsunya hendak tahu terbit. "Siapa sebenarnya?" tanyanya, sambil menunjuk kepalanya ke arah Yah...

is his wife that procures them for him, from poor areas in the countryside. (*The Root of all Evil*: 99-100). Apparently his relationship with Tati de-stabilizes this arrangement, and so the wife, to preserve the status quo (her marriage), as well as her control over her husband's sexuality, takes action by disabling Tati.

At this point, Komala intervenes and attempts to 'redeem' the situation, by getting compensation and justice for Tati. What is revealed in her campaign is the powerlessness of prostitutes against the underworld of big business in Jakarta – and the poverty and fear that prevents other nightclub workers from coming forward as witnesses. Even the Legal Aid organization that she approaches warns her that the nightclub boss, because of his wealth and business connections, is virtually untouchable.

Moralizing

Moralizing in literary works can emerge directly from the author, indirectly from the characters or narrator, or through comments from reviewers or the reading public. Censorship and refusal to publish are other less overt forms of moralizing. Authors sometimes employ punishment or misfortune as a moral lesson to readers; this is especially overt in educational versions of folk tales published before Indonesia's independence by Balai Pustaka. Moralizing can also manifest in the reluctance of social or government agencies to offer social services or legal protection to marginalized groups such as prostitutes.

Mas Marco's moral spokesman in "Black Semarang" is a young Indonesian socialist who is thrown alternately into melancholy and anger by 'the social system, which gave rise to such poverty, while making a small group of people wealthy.' (Kartodikromo 1981: 7) While wandering the streets of Semarang as a politically engaged *flaneur*, the young man observes many examples of the 'evils of capitalism', including a brothel, run by an opium-smoking doorkeeper.

In "Images of Extravagance", the young spendthrift who squanders his month's wages on the pursuit of pleasure has his possessions confiscated; he contracts a venereal infection, and is forced to sign up as a contract worker to go to the plantations of Deli in Sumatra. In this case it is the 'client' who is punished; the fate of Atimah is not discussed. (Kartodikromo 1981: 17)

Marco's conclusions about prostitutes are a political treatise about the evils of capitalism, poverty, lack of a proper education, and ignorance. Prostitutes are social parasites,

depraved and morally degraded, objects to be sold, vampires who prey upon men, and who have lost all self-respect and honour; they are deprived of moral and spiritual training, and have forgotten where they have come from. In emotional terms they are out to 'snare victims' and to relieve them of their money, and, they have 'hearts full of venom'. None of the women is seen as more than two-dimensional - they are actors on the political stage of Marco's socialist propaganda.

Belenggu created a storm of controversy at the time of its publication, partly because of its open depiction of adultery, partly because 'traditional' values and moral judgments play no part in the novel. The novel had been rejected by Balai Pustaka (on moral grounds) and was subsequently published as a triple number of the pioneering literary and cultural journal *Pujangga Baru* in 1940. According to Friedus (1977: 42) 'critics of the book objected to the author's frank treatment of the themes of alienation, infidelity and prostitution on the basis that it served no purpose to display such dark aspects of life to the public', and that 'traditionalist and religious circles attacked the work as immoral, even obscene'.

Nor are the controversial issues resolved by karma, or by the death or misfortune of any of the leading characters. Indeed, it could be said that it is issues of independence and personal freedom that dominate the novel, including women's emancipation from the stereotype of *kodrat*.

In his introduction to the collection of Indonesian short stories *Beyond the Horizon* David Hill (1998: xxviii) remarks of Gerson Poyk: 'Concern for the marginalized and minorities runs through many of his stories, which are peopled by the disabled, the lonely and the downtrodden....'. In Poyk's story "Swaying", both the exploiters and the exploited come from marginalized sectors of society. Overt authorial moralizing is replaced by the presence of a European spectator, who becomes an unwilling witness to the girl's situation. When the German visits the house where the girl is kept, the barber's partner accuses her of concealing money that she has received from her customers. He then burns her repeatedly with a cigarette. The reader-as-witness (represented by the European visitor) is placed in a difficult moral position by the disability of the barber; it is a case of the crippled exploiting the powerless.

'You don't know the meaning of gratitude!' snarled the man. 'I got you out of the village, bought you dresses and make up, provided your food in the early days, gave you a

strategic place to stay, and I'm the one who protects you. Come on, hand over the money. You don't expect me to believe that not one out of ten customers has paid!'

... Then he suddenly took a draw on the long aromatic clove cigarette he was smoking, pulled her close and burnt her on the breast with it. She shrieked like a bitch that has been doused with boiling water. Before her first shriek had subsided, the end of the burning cigarette was pressed against her thigh several times. Her heart-rending screams grew louder but the man was unperturbed. He was absorbed in his game, as if he were pressing piano keys with one hand, playing a sadistic melody. His hand played faster and faster and finally, the woman fainted. (Poyk 1998: 5 - 6 / 1968: 201) ²⁸

In Anggraeni's novel, it is implied that Tati has become too ambitious, and aspires to be more than a 'kept woman'. A layer of guilt is added by her brother's attitude. He has never got used to Tati being a whore, and feels responsible for her later misfortunes.

From a moral point of view, there is also a lack of sympathy for Tati, from both co-workers and middle-class citizens who hear about the incident. They feel that Tati has brought misfortune upon herself by 'not knowing her place' and, (in the case of middleclass wives) that she deserves her fate because her position as a mistress is immoral.

Tati wanted more than hostess or kept woman status. I don't know how true this is, but she put pressure on the boss to divorce his wife and marry her. The boss refused, yet he wouldn't give her up either. You see, she was like a breath of fresh air for him. She was quick-witted and intelligent, apart from being good in bed. (The Root of all Evil: 100)

In Sriwidodo's story about rock bottom prostitution, there is no moralizing, no idealizing, no punishment or redemption. However, there is an underlying moral tone that suggests that Dumina's prostitution is constrained by her responsibility to her family.

²⁸ "Tidak tahu membalas budi!"geram laki2 itu. "Sajalah jang membawa kau dari dusun, jang membelikan kau badju, jang membelikan kau beda gintju segala, jang memberikan kau makan dihari2 pertama, jang memberikan kau tempat tinggal jang strategis, jang melindungi kau. Ayo, kasih kesini duitnja, masa sepuluh orang tamu tidak ada satupun jang bajari!"... Kemudian sang lelaki merokok tjepat2 sebuah rokok kretek menjan jang pandjang lalu ditariknja perempuan itu kedekatnja, dibakarnja tetek perempuan itu. Maka terkainglah perempuan itu seperti seekor anjing betina yang disirami air mendidih. Belum lagi habis kaingnja jang pertama udjung rokok kretek jang sedang menjala itu disundutkan kepahanja beberapa kali. Kaing perempuan itu makin menusuk hati telinga, tetapi laki2 itu tenang sadja. Ia asjik dengan permainannja, seolah2 sedang menekan tuts piano dengan satu tangan, memainkan sebuah lagu sadistis. Tangannja bermain makin tjepat dan achirnja wanita itu pingsan...

Later, she thought about the naïve girl in the boat, who finally ran home in the pouring rain, who reminded Dumina of her own younger sisters, as they wore the same school uniform.

Ah, who cares, let things run their course. Wasn't her own task hard enough, sending money for schooling and shopping for her family every month? Not to mention that the ocean was not as friendly now as it used to be. (Sriwidodo 1994: 35)²⁹

Agency and Outcomes

Although there is a reference to an opium-smoking brothel keeper in "Black Semarang", Atimah in "Images of Extravagance" is quite capable of making her own private arrangements with clients. The prostitutes in Marco's third story, "The Corrupted Life of a Big City", solicit independently at the market in Surabaya, where Marco's 'observers', two men attending a workers' conference, see two sailors with 'at least seven neatly dressed women swarming about them, laughing loudly and pulling occasionally at their sleeves. Quite obviously they were the "flowers of the night", - busy, modern and famous Surabaya's "decorations".' (Kartodikromo 1981: 22)

At the conclusion of *Belenggu*, Yah makes her own choice, sailing to New Caledonia to find new beginnings. She has been given strength to face the future by connecting with her past. She is motivated not only by the desire to protect Tono's reputation, but by her conviction that she has travelled too far to ever conform to social expectations of a conventional wifely role. As 'the other woman' she had been content, as a wife she would feel stifled. Yet she is never portrayed as unfortunate or a victim, although the references to her past life hint at many difficulties. In the end, she takes charge of her life and embraces new possibilities without bitterness.

'Rohayah turned around. Darkness there as well, but she knew across the wild ocean there was another world, a new but silent world... Her sadness too was only one drop in the ocean of human misery. She was only one among many... What is happiness and what is sadness? Where lies the difference? She was not alone in sadness and she was not alone in joy. (Shackles: 126 / *Belenggu*: 149) ³⁰

²⁹ Kemudian, bayangan anak perempuan ingusan di perahu itu. Yang akhirnya berlari pulang di bawah hujan lebat, yang menyentakkan Dumina akan bayangan adik-adik perempuannya dalam seragam yang sama seperti anak ingusan di perahu itu.

Ah, masa bodoh, biarkan kondisi memilih jalannya sendiri. Bukankah perannya sudah cukup repot, mengirim uang sekolah, belanja keluarga tiap bulan. Belum lagi kalau lautan tak seramah sekarang.

³⁰ Rohaya berbalik [...]disana gelap juga, tapi semangatnya tahu, disanalah, lautan lepas, disana dunia lain, memang dunia baru, tapi sunyi... kesedihan hatiku setitik saja dalam lautan kedukaan manusia... ah, mana sedih, mana gembira? Bukankah orang semuanya merasa sedih juga, merasa gembira juga? Bukan aku saja merasa rusuh, aku seorang saja dari pada yang banyak itu.

Komala's campaign on behalf of Tati comes to a dead end until she finds a driver (ironically, a young man) who has witnessed the incident and is willing to testify. In the end, it is Tati who refuses to cooperate. She wants to forget the whole thing and go home to her parents.

If we went on with it, no matter how discreetly, it would still create a lot of publicity. Tati's pictures might even appear in the newspapers. That's the last thing she'd want. She'd arouse hostile reactions amongst the married women. They'd consider it colossal cheek of her to demand any compensation at all from him. If, despite all that, we did win the case, who'd guarantee that he'd keep his part of the obligation? The Legal Aid gets a lot of cases every day; it'd be physically impossible for them to police it. All in all, Kom, it'd be an unnecessary trauma for Tati. She hasn't got over the present one yet. (The Root of all Evil: 137 – 138).

Thus Komala's crusade is a failure. She berates herself for her arrogance:

It's my stupidity! I thought I understood the sufferings of the downtrodden women in this country. I thought I was enlightening people on the plight of others! Serves me right for being so smug... I was so presumptuous, taking for granted that what I thought of and what I was doing would win Tati's approval, and gratitude perhaps? What arrogance! (The Root of all Evil: 137)

One message of Anggraeni's novel is that the prostitute has no rights and no agency – the case with workers in the informal sector in general and sex workers in particular. Apart from Komala, who is an outsider, there is no peer group support from other women, who do not wish to jeopardize their own positions. The prostitute's position is fragile – without physical good looks she is nothing – and her recourse to the law (through Legal Aid) is also insufficient to challenge the power cartels of Jakarta's nightlife. Thus there are two layers of agency: first, Komala's failure to intercede on Tati's behalf with the Legal Aid organization. Secondly, Tati's fatalistic acceptance of the situation and refusal to cooperate with Komala may be interpreted as a form of passive resistance, although by so doing she surrenders her chance to redress the injustice she has suffered. In this case, the patriarchy (represented by the nightclub owner and his wife) has triumphed.

"Swaying" is a bitter story of a prostitute who has absolutely no agency, although she shows some resistance by withholding payments from her 'clients', a rebellious act for which she is severely punished. The girl is subjected to sadistic torture and expected to

feel grateful for food, clothing and shelter. The crab barber and his friend exploit her, taking advantage of the misfortunes of a family caught in a vicious cycle of poverty. At the end of the story, the girl's mother emerges from under the bed with her granddaughter, returns the money to the pimp and goes back to begging on the trains. As she leaves she advises the girl to 'Look for a decent job, become a servant in a big house, sell things, do anything at all, but whatever you do, get away from this place!' (Swaying: 8) The alternatives that her mother suggests (domestic service or small trading) are unlikely to be available to a village girl who has no skills or capital, caged like an animal and forced to service men to support her pimps. Thus her position as captive prostitute is both involuntary and severely constrained by her circumstances.

Sriwidodo's story highlights the difficulties for prostitutes at the bottom end of the scale. Dumina is always in arrears; on that particular night she only makes enough to pay her outstanding debts. For such a small return, she stoically endures a series of degrading incidents with men. She puts on her ordinary outfit once more and goes home in the guise of a household servant. The author offers no romantic vision for the future; Dumina expects none.

Because of their unconventional approaches both in literary form and to the theme of sex work, I analyze Dewi Lestari's *Supernova* (2001) and Eka Kurniawan's *Cantik itu Luka* (2004) separately. *Supernova* is a paradigm of an 'emergent sex worker' as defined by Surtees, while Kurniawan's novel destabilizes the prostitute-as-victim stereotype.

Supernova and Dewi Ayu: Embracing the Profession

Diva, a supermodel, also a high class whore with an online advice column, is one of the characters in Dewi Lestari's novel *Supernova* (2001).³¹ More precisely, she inhabits a novel-within-the-novel, written by two gay lovers, Ruben and Dhimas. Something of a paradox, Diva inhabits a grey area, between reality and fiction, owned not even by the authors who invent her. The only thing she offers for sale is her body.

If we reverse our viewpoint, reality undergoes a change: it seems that prostitution happens everywhere. Almost everyone prostitutes their time, their self-respect, their thoughts, even their souls. And what if this is the most contemptible form of prostitution? (*Supernova*: 50)³²

³¹ English translations from *Supernova* are by the present writer.

³² Ketika kita balikkan cara pandang kita, maka kenyataan berubah: ternyata pelacuran terjadi di mana-mana. Hampir semua orang melacurkan waktu, jati diri, pikiran, bahkan jiwanya. Dan bagaimana kalau ternyata itulah pelacuran yang paling hina?

Diva spent her childhood in an orphanage where she learnt to develop her own self-esteem. As a call girl and model she commands top prices, and can be selective about her appearances and clients. She has a tendency to be cool and cynical. In fact, she has been nicknamed '*Si Pahit*' (The Sour One).

She was never too friendly, nor actually rude, but she was cold. A terrifying coldness. Not to mention her sadistic tongue, no holds barred. However, she was also a magnet that in the end turned situations to her own advantage. Diva was much in demand. She was a model for the top catwalks. She only appeared at top events, and in bona fide magazines. She never accepted a low fee. The term charity meant nothing to her. She was very professional. She never complained and was always on time. Like Polymer elastic, she was easily manipulated. (Supernova: 52) ³³

She is also cynical about the reactions to her body: there is nothing pleasant about the male eyes that devour her; they are like wild animals that have been chained in a pen for a day and then released, not knowing how to use their freedom. Diva is actually too bored to care. Her blasé attitude extends to the world of business and to her lovers.

As a prostitute, she is rude to her clients, and treats them with contempt. When one of her clients asks her why, with her intelligence, she doesn't get a job as a CEO, she replies:

'It's precisely because I am smarter than you and your *CEO* that I don't want to work like you. What's the difference between our professions? As I have said already, we both sell something. It's only the commodity that's different. What you sell, for me, should not be for sale. My thoughts must be unfettered. You know, I don't sell just anything...' (Supernova: 57)³⁴

In this way, Diva as prostitute has exchanged the world of commerce and business for intellectual freedom by choosing to sell only her body.

³³ Tidak pernah terlalu ramah, tidak juga selalu judes, tapi dia dingin. Dingin yang mengerikan. Belum lagi lidah yang sadis, tanpa tedeng aling-aling. Namun dia juga seperti magnet yang pada akhirnya membalikkan semua kenyataan untuk berpihak padanya. Diva laku keras. Peragawati dan model papan atas. Hanya mau muncul untuk acara besar-besar, dan majalah-majalah bona fide. Tak pernah mau dibayar murah. Tak mengenal istilah acara amal. Tapi ia memang sangat profesional. Tak pernah mengeluh dan selalu tepat waktu. Bagai polimer elastis ia juga amat mudah diarahkan.

³⁴ 'Justru karena saya lebih pintar dari kamu dan *CEO* kamu, makanya saya tidak mau bekerja seperti kalian. Apa bedanya profesi kita? Sudah saya bilang, kita sama-sama berdagang. Komoditasnya saja beda. Apa yang kamu berdagangkan buat saya tidak seharusnya dijual. Pikiran saya harus dibuat merdeka. Toh, berdagang pun saya tidak sembarang.'

According to Dhimas and Ruben, their modern Avatar gives 'sermons' on the internet. 'She is a turbulence that can be accessed at any time and in any place. She will amplify the system of people's understanding without hierarchy, without the shadow of institutions or dogma. She is really non-linear! And the internet is a technology that knows no territorial boundaries.' (Supernova: 139)³⁵ From this point Diva begins to weave her life into that of the other characters, through her on-line column as Supernova. She begins to create her own history, outside the control of the two 'authors', giving online advice to the other characters. Like Shakuntala in Ayu Utami's *Saman*, Diva becomes a catalyst and philosophical commentator on the lives of the other characters, 'An Avatar with modern aesthetics. Not isolated in the forest.' (Supernova: 137)³⁶

Dewi Ayu, the main protagonist of Eka Kurniawan's *Cantik Itu Luka* (2004)³⁷ challenges a number of myths and taboos about ideals of womanhood: beauty, virginity, motherhood, marriage, religion, racial purity, incest and silence. To all these taboos, Dewi Ayu maintains a supreme indifference. Of course, this is not a realistic novel, although the events described closely parallel Indonesia's history. The story is set in Halimunda, an imagined coastal town on the south coast of Java. Dewi Ayu is born of an incestuous union between half-siblings Henri and Aneu Stammer, the children of a wealthy Dutch plantation owner, from his legal wife Marietje and his Javanese mistress, Ma Iyang. After Henri and Aneu flee to Europe, they leave Dewi Ayu in a basket on the doorstep of her grandparents, who educate her in a Franciscan convent where she shocks the nuns with her outspoken opinions.

I was born into a Dutch Catholic family and became a Catholic before reading the declaration of Islamic faith and became a Muslim at the time of my first marriage. I was once married and once devout, but now I have lost all of that. However, it doesn't mean I have lost love. To be a prostitute you must love everything, all people, all things: genitals, fingertips, or cows' hooves. I feel that I have become both a saint and a sufi. (Kurniawan 2004: 142)³⁸

³⁵ 'Dia adalah turbulensi yang bisa diakses kapan saja, di mana saja. Dia akan mengamplifikasi system pemahaman orang-orang tanpa hierarki, tanpa bayang-bayang institusi atau dogma apa pun. Benar-benar nonlinear! Dan internet adalah teknologi yang tak kenal batas teritori. Cocok, kan?'

³⁶ Avatar dengan estetika modern. Tidak terisolasi di hutan.

³⁷ English translations from *Cantik itu Luka* are by the present writer.

³⁸ Aku lahir dari keluarga Katolik Belanda dan jadi orang Katolik sebelum membaca syahadat dan jadi orang Islam di hari pekawinan pertamaku. Aku pernah kawin sekali dan pernah jadi

When her family leaves Halimunda at the time of the Japanese invasion, Dewi Ayu, together with other women from Dutch families, is forced to become a prostitute for the Japanese Army. However, she survives the experience by becoming a kind of mentor to the other young women forced into prostitution.

After the Japanese occupation Dewi Ayu continues her life as a prostitute for moral reasons: a prostitute does not create heartbreak for anyone.

“At least a prostitute does not force a man to take a mistress, because every time you take a mistress, you are perhaps causing misery for her sweetheart... At the most, the prostitute causes pain for a wife who is well and truly married, and it’s her fault that her husband goes to a brothel.” (Kurniawan 2004: 395)³⁹

She becomes a legend in Halimunda, admired and respected for her beauty and intelligence. As the most sought-after prostitute in the brothel of Mama Kalong, Dewi Ayu has special privileges; she works at the brothel at night but returns home during the day to her family house. As discussed in other literary works, her dress (and that of the brothel owner, Mama Kalong) is an indicator of her superior status.

If Mama Kalong was the queen of the city, Dewi Ayu was its princess. Both of them possessed the same taste in the way they presented themselves. They were women who looked after their bodies, and their dress was even more decorous than that worn by virtuous ladies anywhere. Mama Kalong usually wore hand-drawn batik sarongs that she ordered directly from the Solo and Yogyakarta districts, or from Pekalongan, with a *kebaya* and her hair in a chignon. She dressed like this even in the brothel, apart from when she was relaxing, when she wore just a loose housedress. Whereas Dewi Ayu preferred patterned dresses that she ordered from a tailor, exact copies from the fashion pages of women’s magazines. Even respectable women secretly learned a lot from them about how to look after their bodies and their clothes. (Kurniawan 2004: 117)⁴⁰

orang beragama, tapi kini aku kehilangan semuanya. Namun bukan berarti aku kehilangan cinta. Menjadi seorang pelacur kau harus mencintai segalanya, semua orang, semua benda: kemaluan, ujung jari, atau kaki sapi. Aku merasa jadi seorang santa sekaligus sufi.

³⁹ Pelacur paling tidak tak membuat orang harus punya gundik, sebab setiap kau mengambil gundik, kau mungkin menyakiti hati seseorang yang adalah kekasih gundik itu... Tapi seorang pelacur paling banter menyakiti seorang istri yang jelas-jelas sudah dikawin, dan adalah kesalahannya membuat suami harus pergi ke tempat pelacuran.

⁴⁰ Jika Mama Kalong bagaikan ratu di kota itu, maka Dewi Ayu adalah putri.

Keduanya memiliki selera yang nyaris sama dalam berpenampilan. Mereka jenis perempuan-perempuan yang merawat tubuh dengan baik, dan berpakaian bahkan jauh lebih sopan daripada perempuan-perempuan saleh mana pun. Mama Kalong suka mengenakan jarik batik tulis yang didatangkannya langsung dari daerah Solo dan Yogyakarta serta Pekalongan,

After bearing three beautiful daughters, (all from different fathers) Dewi Ayu decides that beauty is a curse and leads only to heartbreak. In answer to her prayers, her last child, a daughter, is born hideously ugly after she fails to abort it. She decides to die when the baby is 12 days old, without seeing its face. Twenty-one years later, Dewi Ayu arises from the grave to see the child that she has cursed, and a few months later, retreats to the grave once more.

When walking the streets after emerging from the grave, she causes a riot, and a *kyai* (Islamic preacher) orders her to take off her shroud. Her reply is typically irreverent.

‘If you are asking a prostitute to take off her clothes,’ said Dewi Ayu with a mocking glance, ‘you must have the money to pay me.’ The *kyai* went off in a hurry, begging her pardon, and didn’t come back. (Kurniawan 2004: 9) ⁴¹

After her death, her maid Rosinah, a mute girl from the mountains, tells Dewi Ayu’s parents that she is writing her employer’s biography. This is an alternative to moralizing by an author/narrator; Rosinah, who cannot speak, gives a voice to Dewi Ayu’s story, as she has in life, without judgement. (Kurniawan: 394)

Although their stories are set in different eras, both Dewi Ayu and Supernova have considerable control over their lives. Like Supernova, Dewi Ayu has the ability to turn situations to her own advantage. She also has a sharp, satirical tongue, and intelligence, taste and education. Dewi Ayu’s pragmatism allows her to be indifferent even to rape by Japanese soldiers; she resists by lying on the bed like an unresponsive corpse, and suggests to her friends that one strategy for dealing with the soldiers is to ‘turn the tables, rape them.’ (Kurniawan 2004: 99) ⁴² In this way, she emerges from a life of forced prostitution with far less trauma than other characters such as Marice in *Burung-Burung Manyar*, Tinung in *Ca-bau-kan* or Srintil in *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, all of who are presented as unfortunate victims of the Japanese Occupation or the Communist aftermath. In fact, Dewi Ayu freely chooses prostitution as a profession after the war,

dengan kebaya dan rambut disanggul. Bahkan demikianlah penampilannya di tempat pelacuran, kecuali di saat santai ia hanya mengenakan semacam daster longgar. Sementara Dewi Ayu menyukai gaun-gaun bermotif, yang dipesan dari seorang penjahit langganan, yang menjiplaknya persis dari halaman mode majalah perempuan. Bahkan perempuan-perempuan saleh secara diam-diam banyak belajar kepadanya bagaimana merawat tubuh dan berpakaian.

⁴¹ ‘Karena kau meminta seorang pelacur membuka pakainnya’, kata Dewi Ayu dengan tatapan mengejek, ‘kau harus punya uang untuk membayarku.’ Si *kyai* segera berlalu, berdoa meminta ampun dan tak pernah datang lagi.

⁴² “Kalau begitu, berbuatlah sebaliknya... Perkosalah mereka.”

and (unlike Srintil) has no aspirations to marriage with all its *kodrat wanita* implications. As an example of the privileged working conditions enjoyed by Dewi Ayu, see Surur's remarks below:

After the war is over, Dewi Ayu continues her profession as a prostitute. She is by no means a cheap prostitute who is available for sex with numerous men in a single night. Her ability to negotiate with Mama Kalong, the owner of the brothel, together with the asset of an extraordinarily beautiful and fascinating body, means that Mama Kalong must take extra care to make sure that her number one prostitute remains happy "working" at her establishment. Mama Kalong has to accept that Dewi Ayu wants to service only one man per night. This is why all the men in and around Halimunda compete with each other to enjoy her beautiful body. In fact, Dewi Ayu becomes a site of contestation for all the men who want to sleep with her. Of course, Dewi Ayu's willingness to do this is in proportion to the amount of money those men are able to pull out of their pockets and wallets. (Surur 2003: 125 – 126)⁴³

Nevertheless, the attitude of 'respectable' women to Dewi Ayu and Mama Kalong is still ambivalent:

They brought happiness to the city. There wasn't an important event in the city to which they were not invited... Although respectable women hated them both because they knew that their husbands were at "Make Love Till You Die" [*Bercinta Sampai Mati*] if they disappeared at night, they were friendly to their faces (and sneered behind their backs). (Kurniawan 2004: 118)⁴⁴

From an analysis of the literary texts it is obvious that women engaged in prostitution have agency and resistance depending on their circumstances; from the totally powerless

⁴³ Setelah masa perang usai, Dewi Ayu tetap berprofesi sebagai pelacur. Ia bukan pelacur kacangan yang dalam satu malam bisa bercinta dengan banyak lelaki. Berbekal kemampuan untuk melakukan negosiasi dengan Mama Kalong, geromo rumah pelacuran, disertai modal tubuh yang luarbiasa cantik dan mempesona membuat Mama Kalong harus ekstra hati-hati untuk menjaga supaya pelacur nomor satu itu tetap betah "bekerja" di tempatnya. Mama Kalong pun harus menyerah ketika Dewi Ayu hanya mau melayani satu laki-laki dalam satu malam. Keadaan inilah yang membuat laki-laki di seantero Halimunda saling berebut ingin menikmati tubuh indahnya, sehingga Dewi Ayu benar-benar menjadi ruang kontestasi di antara sekian banyak laki-laki untuk bisa tidur denganya. Tentunya, kemauan Dewi Ayu harus pula diimbangi dengan kemampuan para lelaki itu untuk seberapa kuat mereka harus mengeluarkan uang dari saku dan dompetnya.

⁴⁴ Mereka adalah sumber kebahagiaan kota. Tak ada satu pun acara penting kota itu yang tak mengundang mereka... Bahkan meskipun perempuan-perempuan saleh sangat membenci keduanya karena mereka tahu suami-suami mereka ada di "Bercinta Sampai Mati" jika menghilang di malam hari, memberi sapaan ramah di hadapan mereka (dan mencibir di belakang).

(the captive girl in Gerson Poyk's story) to the privileged sex worker with maximum choice (*Supernova*). Rohaya and Dewi Ayu embrace the positive possibilities of the profession. Dumina in *Antara Riak dan Ombak* and Tati in *The Root of All Evil* are pragmatic and accept the limitations, although it is Tati's aspirations that bring about her ruin. There are also varying degrees of social backlash and acceptance: Dumina is spat on by a group of youths; the girl in "Swaying" is burnt with cigarettes. Mama Kalong and Dewi Ayu are respected citizens with a high profile in Halimunda (although despised by the wives). Likewise the confrontations of wife and prostitute in *Belenggu* and *The Root of all Evil* have different outcomes; Tati is scarred for life, while Rohaya and Tini establish a sense of camaraderie. To sum up, the varied outcomes for prostitutes in Indonesian literature depends on background, education, historical circumstances and the individual characters of each woman, reinforcing Surtees' claim for a more complex spectrum of agency and resistance within the prostitution / sex work industry.

* * * *

The next chapter is devoted to an analysis of an even more peripheral group of women in Indonesia. Lesbians apparently have no allegiance with the patriarchy (although, ironically, the earliest lesbian organization in Indonesia, *Perlesin*, had its own branch of Dharma Wanita). Indonesian lesbians are much more invisible personally and professionally than, for example, male transvestites (who have an accepted and historically ritual presence as the third gender), although the lesbian lifestyle has tended to be sensationalized by the mass media. Public statements by some of Indonesia's politicians have denied that lesbians are entitled to Indonesian citizenship, and lesbians have an uncomfortable relationship with mainstream feminist groups as well as the gay men's movement. In the early twenty-first century literary works with lesbian themes are beginning to appear in print. At least one of these literary works, *Garis Tepi Seorang Lesbian* (as well as its author) has received disproportionate media publicity, reflecting the ongoing voyeuristic and negative attitudes of Indonesian society to sexual diversity / 'deviance'.

CHAPTER 5

LESBIANS: GARLIC AMONG THE ONIONS?

SETTING THE SCENE

'As activists within Chandra Kirana, we often wonder where our place really is. If we join the gay men's movement, we become the Second Sex and are coopted. If we join the Indonesian women's movement, we become like garlic among the onions – step sisters of the women's movement. Where do Indonesian lesbians want to go from here?' (Bunga Jeumpa and Ulil 2001: 13)

What is understood as sexual deviance in Indonesia is much broader than in western societies. According to the dominant discourse, 'The institution of marriage is the only approved context for sexual relations, outside of which sex is only practiced by men and prostitutes.' (Gayatri 1996: 91) While there are other forms of 'deviant' sexual **behaviour**, lesbianism is also clearly a **female identity** (as are the other categories of women analysed in each chapter of this thesis). Therefore literary works dealing with deviant *behaviours* such as sadomasochism, incest or transvestitism will not be analysed in this chapter. I also acknowledge the loaded nature of the word 'deviance' but will continue to use this term (without its pejorative associations) to refer to behaviour outside mainstream sexual discourses.

In this chapter, I contextualize lesbianism in Indonesia with reference to the writings of other scholars, most importantly Evelyn Blackwood, Saskia Wieringa and BJD Gayatri. In the second section, "Lesbians in Literature", I offer a brief commentary on the ambiguities of 'lesbian writers' and 'lesbian texts', grounded in theoretical discourses from the West. I then proceed to an analysis of Indonesian literary works that foreground lesbian or woman-centred relationships, from a twelfth century Javanese *kakawin* to Djenar Maesa Ayu's *Nayla* (2005).

Stuart Hall (1993: 73) proposes that in the area of political deviance, the prevailing definitions have been the product of three main agencies: professional politicians ('The legitimate "gatekeepers" of the political domain'), agents of face-to-face-control (such as university administrators, the army, and the police) and the mass media. Although each of these agencies has a different perspective on political deviance, in the face of challenge they tend to favour consensus. It appears that in Indonesia, all

three agencies conspire to keep lesbians in an outsider position, both socially and politically.

Although homosexuality in Indonesia is not actually illegal (Gayatri 1996: 92), the influence of the print media, as the formative agent for public opinion about female homosexuality, combined with the perception that lesbianism (like feminism) is a “concept” imported from Western society, ensure that lesbians remain both sensationalized and stigmatised.

The impression conveyed by the print media is that the stereotypical life of the female homosexual is part of a world of criminality, drugs, nightlife, promiscuity and sickness... Many psychologists and scientists still maintain that homosexuality is an abnormality which can be cured, while religious leaders and government officials instruct the public to avoid such deviant behaviour and fulfil their obligations to marry and have children. (Gayatri 1996: 90)

Furthermore, Indonesia’s political leaders have declared that homosexuality is unconstitutional. ‘The public is socialized to believe what their leaders say, and such condemnation increases social sanctions and oppression of homosexuality’ (Gayatri 1996: 94). In 1994 Mien Sugandhi, then Minister for Women’s Affairs, invoked both *kodrat wanita* and Pancasila¹ in a statement that clearly situates lesbians on the margins of Indonesian society, as well as restating the conventional definition of *kodrat*:

I can also understand that lesbians have individual rights, but I cannot accept them as Indonesian women. My belief is that lesbianism is not in accordance with Pancasila, because lesbians have forgotten their fundamental duties to be mothers, giving birth and raising children... (Statement by Mien Sugandhi, *Suara Karya*, 6 June 1994, cited in Gayatri 1996: 86).²

A Californian academic, Tom Boellstorff (2002: 94) reinforces the ‘deviant’ labelling, as well as suggesting an incidence of homosexuality that is wider than the middle class:

¹ Pancasila: Indonesia’s constitution.

² Gayatri (1996: 94) notes that at the 1994 United Nations Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, the President of Indonesia and various ministers spoke against homosexuality.

(W)hile *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians are more visible in everyday life and the mass media than they were in 1981, many ordinary Indonesians still do not know what *gay* and *lesbi* mean. They think they are English words for *waria* (transvestites), or that they refer only to foreigners. Indonesians who do know what *lesbi* and *gay* mean often think of these people as 'deviants' (*orang-orang yang menyimpan*), people who go outside the norms of society, (*di luar norma-norma masyarakat*). Often it is incorrectly assumed that *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians are part of the *kelas eksekutif* or the rich, even though most of them make under Rp 500.000 per month, do not speak English and have never travelled outside Indonesia. (Boellstorff 2002: 94) ³

Although Indonesia has a long history of women's movements and women's activism, (the first women's organization, Poetri Mardika, was established in 1912, and the first National Women's Congress took place in 1928)⁴ it is not surprising that even the word 'feminist' was rarely mentioned during New Order Indonesia, being linked with the communist-affiliated women's organization GERWANI, sexual immorality and political subversion (Wieringa 1998: 143). According to Saparinah Sadli (Robinson and Bessell 2002: 82), '(I) n the early 1990s both women and men scholars still had a negative attitude towards the terms "feminism", "feminist" and even "gender"', indicating also an antipathy to western concepts of woman's liberation.

When Sadli and her colleagues were setting up a curriculum for Kajian Wanita, a women's studies program at the University of Indonesia, 'we were very careful not to use terms like 'gender perspective' or 'feminist perspective'. Instead, we adopted the term 'women's perspective', even though we were in fact discussing the methodologies usually known as feminist or gender perspectives' (idem). This approach, according to Sadli, attracted criticism from Indonesian feminists, including Kalyanamitra, one of the earliest feminist organizations in Indonesia.⁵

If self-identified feminists in Indonesia criticized the cautious approach of academe, the relationship between mainstream feminists and lesbian groups was also uncomfortable. In Gayatri's opinion:

³ The italics and Indonesian glosses in this quotation are Boellstorff's.

⁴ For an overview of women's activism in Indonesia, see Khofifah Indar Parawansa 'Institution Building', in Robinson & Bessell 2002, *Women in Indonesia*: 68-77

⁵ For an extended discussion of the Kajian Wanita Program at the University of Indonesia, see Saparinah Sadli, in Robinson and Bessell: 80 - 91

Women's groups using feminist ideas are frequently labelled lesbian, with the result that they try and distance themselves from the issue of female homosexuality or related issues of sexuality... Many female homosexuals avoid the women's movement because they do not want to go through this experience [of public disclosure], and at the same time they feel that the issue of their sexuality is a private one which is not related to the current state of feminist discourse in Indonesia. (Gayatri 1996: 90 - 91)

Blackwood and Wieringa's *Female Desires: Same-Sex Relations and Transgender Practices across Cultures* (1999a) is an important contribution to scholarship about lesbian relations and sexual diversity in non-western societies, including Indonesia. In a carefully researched essay, "Sapphic shadows: challenging the silence in the study of sexuality" (Blackwood & Wieringa 1999b: 39 – 63) the editors discuss the reasons for the scarcity of historical documentation on the subject by anthropologists and sociologists, ranging from self-censorship to the reticence and ignorance of the researchers themselves (usually men). The tendency to attribute non-heterosexual practices to 'deprivation', especially in Middle Eastern harems, became a focus for the exaggerated Orientalist fantasies of European travellers and writers.

As an example of the 'deprivation theory', Blackwood and Wieringa mention Carey and Houben's interpretation of a 'lesbian scandal' at the Javanese court of Surakarta in 1824. The original text by a Dutch scholar, J.W. Winter is translated as follows:

Ever since he (Pakubuwana V) had discovered when the women would be lying beside each other in various places, that among their indecencies, by way of a piece of wax which had been shaped in the form of the private parts of men they would be amidst each other, he had it made into law that to prevent this harmful practice, as they might never be interested in love with men any more, he would never allow his permanent servants to sleep at night out of his view, so all of them had to lie in front of the door of his room, in a row, six feet from each other. (J.W. Winter, 1902:39, cited in Blackwood & Wieringa 1999: 41 - 42)

Blackwood and Wieringa (1999: 41) point out that the presumption of deprivation derives not from Winter, but from Carey and Houben (1992: 20) who 'project onto this incident their disbelief that women could actually enjoy same-sex practices unless forced to by the absence of men.' Blackwood and Wieringa (1999: 42) also note that '[A] ccording to Winter's account, the issue was not the frustration of the ladies, but the fear of the ruler that the ladies might like the game with their piece of wax too much'. I concur that it is likely that Pakubuwana's own fear of 'deprivation' led to this

act of resistance to the palace women's experimentation! Gayatri (1997: 9) also confirms that the *keputren* (women's quarters) within a Javanese kraton was a secure space in which it was acceptable for women to engage in intimate same-sex relationships.⁶

Early accounts of lesbian sexuality in Indonesia, although limited, are not confined to the Javanese kraton. Blackwood and Wieringa (1999: 44) mention a 'monumental compilation on same-sex love' by Ferdinand Karsch-Haack⁷, published in Munich in 1911. A special section on 'Tribadism among primitive peoples' described transgender and cross-dressing practices and the use of dildos made of wood or wax by Acehnese, Balinese and Dayak women (Wieringa 1999: 216).

Blackwood and Wieringa's volume also includes three essays on lesbianism in modern Indonesia, by Alison Murray (on class and Jakarta lesbians); Evelyn Blackwood, (on *Tombois* in West Sumatra); and Saskia Wieringa (on butch-femme lesbians in Jakarta and Lima). All three authors write from personal experience of lesbian relationships in Indonesia. What emerges is a picture of contrasting expectations: the Indonesians adhered to fairly rigid butch/femme role-playing, in contrast to the more 'androgynous' self-images of the western writers. According to Gayatri (1996: 92), while butch/femme role-playing can be seen as 'a form of exploiting government gender ideology' perceptions of these stereotypes have also inhibited the understanding of female homosexuality, even among feminists.

For many years BJD Gayatri was the pioneer activist for Indonesian lesbians. University-educated, she coordinated Chandra Kirana, Indonesia's first lesbian network and, in the 1990s, represented Indonesia's lesbian / feminist community at several international conferences and symposiums. In her seminal article "Indonesian lesbians writing their own script: Issues of feminism and sexuality" (1996: 86 - 97), she gives an overview of feminism in Indonesia and its relationship to female homosexuality, as well as discussing the influence of the media in influencing public opinion and furthering stereotypical views of women.

Gayatri (1996: 94) identifies two periods when the issue of lesbianism was given media attention: the first, from 1981 - 1983, presented the issue of female

⁶ See also: Gayatri 2005: 'Citra Seksualitas Perempuan Jawa', *Jurnal Perempuan* 41: 81 - 88

⁷ Karsch-Haack, F. 1911. *Das Gleichgeschlechtliche Leben der Naturvölker*. Reinhardt: Munich. Cited in Blackwood and Wieringa (1999: 61)

homosexuality as a social phenomenon, beginning with the landmark marriage of a same-sex female couple, Bonnie and Jossie, in Jakarta⁸. During the second period (1987 – 1989), the media took a pathological stance, suggesting that homosexuality was a sexual deviancy caused by Western influence and must be cured. Gayatri has mentioned that she has been cautioned by certain liberal female writers not to associate with Western lesbian feminists, in case she is ‘infected’ by this disease from the West.⁹

Dede Oetomo, the pioneering activist for homosexual rights in Indonesia (and founder of the gay and lesbian organization Gaya Nusantara), wrote many articles on gay and lesbian issues during the later years of the New Order¹⁰. A compilation of these articles and essays, spanning the years 1980 - 1998 was republished in his book *Memberi Suara pada yang Bisu* (Giving a Voice to the Mute), 2001.

Yet this book contains very little material about lesbians or lesbianism, and gay-and-lesbian issues are usually conflated. In Oetomo’s case study of Aceh (based on an English translation of the writings of the Dutch ethnographer Snouck Hurgronie in the early nineteenth century), he concludes that there is no mention of same-sex activities between women in Aceh¹¹, and that this is a failing of ethnographic research about ‘traditional’ (meaning ‘historical’) homosexuality in Indonesia in general (Oetomo 2001: 54). He also mentions that, as in other Indonesian cultures, the Madurese have no expression for homosexual relationships between women (Oetomo 2001: 59).

In a short chapter entitled ‘Lesbians of Indonesia: Where are you?’¹² (Oetomo 2001: 231 – 234), the writer states that very few lesbians have contacted him to join the movement for gay liberation in Indonesia. He also ponders the invisibility of lesbians when compared with the gay (male homosexual) community.

Oetomo (2001: 232) suggests that there is a connection with the social restrictions in Indonesia on women in general. ‘If a woman goes to a park, or a disco, especially

⁸ *Tempo*, 23 May 1981: 51 – 53, See also Boellstorff 2002: 93 – 94; Translation Group 1984, 5 –6; Oetomo 2001: 130

⁹ Gayatri, personal communication, March 2006

¹⁰ See Oetomo 2001: 321 – 325, “Daftar Sumber Tulisan (List of Sources) for publication details of his articles, 1980 – 1998.

¹¹ Cf. Blackwood and Wieringa 1999: 216 for the use of dildos by Acehnese women.

¹² “Lesbian Indonesia: Di mana kalian?” First published in *Gaya Nusantara* No. 10 (May 1989)

alone, certainly she will be looked on as a *perek* (sexual adventurer) or a prostitute'.¹³ Elsewhere (2001: 157) he acknowledges that lesbian groups, both inside and outside Indonesia, have a stronger understanding of the relevant academic discourses through their participation in women's studies programs, and that they may even exist 'under cover' of feminist terminology ('berlindung di bawah terminology feminisme').¹⁴

Oetomo concludes his chapter on lesbians in Indonesia (originally published in 1989) by remarking: 'Perhaps it might be a different story if this had been written by a lesbian thinker' (2001: 234).¹⁵ With regard to this, it is clearly an oversight that he has not referred (at least in a footnote) to the pioneering writings and activist work of BJD Gayatri (1993 – 1997), nor to the cross-cultural research in Indonesia of sociologists and anthropologists from the west: (Alison Murray, Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia Wieringa) especially their essays in the collection *Female Desires* (1999).¹⁶ Oetomo's generalizations and omissions in a book that raised the international profile of Indonesia's homosexual community further highlight the marginality of Indonesian lesbians and the divide between the gay and lesbian communities.

One reason for the imbalance of information in Oetomo's book is probably the split between Gaya Nusantara (GN) and Chandra Kirana. Although the lesbian community was inspired by the foundation of GN in the mid-1980s, and initially worked cooperatively, by 1995 they had become disillusioned. They felt ignored by the gay men's movement, and there were complaints that at the second Gay and Lesbian Congress held in Bandung, West Java in 1995, 'there was not one session or workshop on lesbian issues, and the committee were all men'. (Jeumpa and Ulil 2001: 13) From this time Chandra Kirana has organized independently of the gay men's network. Another turning point for lesbians was the Woman's Coalition Congress in Yogyakarta in 1998, at which Gayatri proposed that lesbian concerns should be an advocacy issue for the Women's Coalition. According to Jeumpa and

¹³ Kalau ada perempuan, apalagi seorang diri, pergi ke taman, disko dan lain-lain, tentulah dikira *perek* atau pelacur.

¹⁴ Cf. Gayatri 1996, 90 – 91. Many lesbians avoid feminist groups because of fear of disclosure, or conceal their sexual orientation from colleagues.

¹⁵ Barangkali akan lain apabila tulisan ini dikarang oleh seorang lesbian pemikir.

¹⁶ Evelyn Blackwood, an American academic and anthropologist, has been researching and writing on issues of cross-cultural sexuality since the mid 1980s. In addition to the material cited in Blackwood & Wieringa (1999), see, for example, Blackwood 1986; 1996.

Ulil (idem), 'with this recognition at national level, the lesbian movement entered a new era, that is, of political struggle within a gender framework.'

There is evidently a demand in Indonesia for more information about lesbian issues for the mainstream feminist reader. A recent issue of *Jurnal Perempuan* (2005, issue 41) with the theme title of 'Sexuality' contains an article on lesbian sexuality (Athena 2005: 71– 80). This article is very informative about identities such as butch/femme and provides detailed descriptions of same-sex practices among women, although there is no specific information about Indonesia.

LESBIANS IN LITERATURE

Pioneering studies of lesbian literature in the west date from 1956¹⁷. In the 1970s, lesbian literary scholars in the west also criticized the exclusion or omission of lesbian literature from mainstream feminist discourses and journals as 'heterosexist'. However, there is now a rich tradition of rediscovered and contemporary lesbian literature and scholarship, although much is still published by small, alternative presses and journals.

Feminist / lesbian theorists are divided on the definitions of both lesbian writers and lesbian texts.¹⁸ Bonnie Zimmerman (1997: 76), for example, proposes that 'the sexual and emotional orientation of a woman profoundly affects her consciousness and thus her creativity.' Terry Castle (1997: 532) also discusses the 'somewhat undertheorized' concept of lesbian fiction, suggesting that '[A] novel written by a lesbian depicting sexual relations between women' might be the most accurate description, but then adds that this relies too much on the 'opacities of biography and eros and lacks a certain psychic and political specificity' (idem).

The long-standing silence of lesbian voices in literature and in the academy obscures the lesbian tradition, and the complexity of defining "lesbian"—is it strictly a sexual

¹⁷ Jeanette Foster 1956: *Sex Variant Women in Literature*, 1956; Gene Danon 1967: *The Lesbian in Literature: A Bibliography*, 1967. Cited in Zimmerman, 1997

¹⁸ See Bonnie Zimmerman 1997, 'What has never been: An overview of lesbian feminist literary criticism', in Warhol & Price Herndl, *Feminisms*: 76–96, and Terry Castle 1997, "Sylvia Townsend Warner and the counterplot of lesbian fiction", *Feminisms*: 532 – 554, for discussions of the various discourses on lesbian fiction, lesbian authorship and lesbian literary criticism. Also Farwell, M. 1990, "Heterosexual plots and lesbian subtexts: Toward a theory of lesbian narrative space". In Jay, K. & Glasgow J. *Lesbian Texts*: 91 – 103

term, or does it mean more loosely “women-identified”? — makes defining a “lesbian text”—one by a lesbian writer? one that depicts lesbian experience? — an important, but perhaps limiting, act. (Warhol & Price Herndl 1997: 74)

For the purposes of this chapter I have focused on **texts** that unambiguously depict female homoerotic bonding, whether or not a sexual episode (in the physical sense) occurs. I have also decided that it is unproductive to restrict my choice to texts by acknowledged (or even debatable) lesbian writers, thus works by Y.B. Mangunwijaya (a male Catholic priest), as well as Ayu Utami and Djenar Maesa Ayu, are included.

Considering the marginalization of female homosexuality outlined in the first part of this chapter, it is not surprising that lesbian literature (literature by or about lesbians) in Indonesia was virtually invisible until the twenty-first century, although there is the probability of a submerged (or newly emerging) homoerotic history. For example, Creese (2004: 50–51) identifies a single, but significant, example of sexual interaction between women in twelfth century *kakawin* literature, involving Rukmini and her companion Kesari:

Day and night they were inseparable, amusing themselves, relaxed yet spirited;
At times discussing erotic enjoyments, everything they said in the form of allusions,
Accompanied by laughter and knowing looks that inspired restlessness, and if
overheard, arousal.

Moreover, it is said that they indulged each other's desires.

If she sensed that the Princess' appearance was as the lover she knew how to [play
the part] of demurring,

Paying no attention, then making advances, speaking, responding—suddenly bold.

Yet she could only respond to Kesari's passion with her bare groin, so it was difficult
for her to fulfill her desire.¹⁹ (Cited in Creese 2004: 51)

Lesbian Texts and Subtexts: An Overview

Roro Mendut (1983), one of a trilogy of novels by the Catholic priest, Y. B. Mangunwijaya, ²⁰ includes a subtext of woman-centred relationships in a Javanese *kraton* context, a counterpoint to the overt antagonism between General Wiroguno and the village girl Mendut. As well as the day-to-day closeness between the various *selir* and Nyai Ajeng, the principal wife in the *keputren*, this subtext is reflected in the

¹⁹ *Hari's Lineage*, 14: 1-2, Javanese kakawin, twelfth century, by the poet Mpu Panuluh, translation by Thomas Hunter.

²⁰ The translation from *Roro Mendut* is by the present writer

close physical and emotional relationship between Roro Mendut and her tomboy *dayang* (maid) Gendhuk Duku. They spend most of their time in each other's company, share confidences and sleep together. This relationship becomes explicitly erotic in Chapter 16:

If only it was permitted, Gendhuk Duku would marry another woman. It would be just like now, sleeping in the embrace of Den Roro, HER Roro. People said that it was a girl's destiny [*gadis kodratnya*] to fall in love with a young man. But for whatever reason, perhaps because she was an orphan, perhaps because she was a tomboy by nature, Gendhuk Duku was confused. Why couldn't she just fall in love with a girl? ... She wrapped her arms around her mistress and sobbed. Mendut stroked her hair affectionately. Lovingly, she wiped the smooth back, wet with perspiration and still dusty. The smell of Gendhuk's body entered her nostrils, and there was a kind of instinctive pleasure that stirred Mendut's belly. A pleasure that came from the flesh, it was true, but it was also a pleasure that came from the beauty of a lotus that only blooms in the night. The lotus, a gift from paradise, that always grows in the mud... Gendhuk once more embraced Den Roro her older sister... And the pair caressed each other [*saling bercumbuan*] to their hearts' content, as consolation for the troubles that overwhelmed them [...] ²¹

Gayatri (1997: 12) has confirmed that until recently there have been scant references to lesbian women in literature, whilst the only novel about a lesbian relationship in a contemporary setting carried the message that lesbian sexuality should be repressed.

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The book, by Mira W., is titled *Relung-relung Gelap Hati Sisi* (The Hidden Niches of Sisi's Heart) 1984. The story is as follows. Although Sisi and Ailin have a platonic relationship, their headmistress (a nun) and their parents suspect them of forming a lesbian relationship. They are forcibly separated. Sisi must bury the lesbian episode in the corners of her heart, carrying on with her 'normal' life, as a dutiful wife and

²¹ Ah, seandainya diperbolehkan, Gendhuk Duku ingin menikah dengan orang yang sama-sama perempuan saja. Seperti sekarang ini, tidur berpelukan dengan Den Roro, ya, roro-NYA. Kata orang, gadis kodratnya jatuh asmara pada pemuda. Tetapi entalah, barangkali karena anak piatu, barangkali karena, kata orang, sifatnya seperti anak laki-laki, Gendhuk Duku betul bingung, mengapa tidak boleh jatuh asmara pada gadis saja? ... Tahu-tahu kedua tangannya sudah merangkul puannya dan terisak-isak ia menangis. Sayang dibelai rambutnya oleh Mendut. Sayang disekanya punggung halusanya yang berkeriat dan masih berdebu. Bau badan si Gendhuk masuk dalam hidung Mendut, dan ada sejenis kenikmatan alam yang menggetarkan *jerohan* Mendut. Kenikmatan bersarana daging memang; namun juga kenikmatan yang berasal dari keindahan teratai yang hanya dilihat memekar di waktu malam. Teratai, anugerah surga, yang selalu tumbuh justru di lumpur... Gendhuk Duku ... merangullah lagi ia, erat-erat pada Den Roro yang *Mbak-ayu* itu... Dan berpuas-puaslah kedua insan itu saling bercumbuan, obat bagi penderitaan yang bertumpuk-tumpuk [...]

mother. Despite her care, the story is uncovered by her brother-in-law and used as blackmail against Sisi, bringing about a divorce from her husband and a separation from her daughter. Although Ailin offers Sisi a place to live and the opportunity to share her lifestyle, Sisi chooses to move to a remote area and practice as a medical doctor, to spend the rest of her life away from her family and from Ailin. (Gayatri 1997: 12).²³

It is significant that since 2000 there has been a proliferation of literary works by Indonesian women writers dealing with lesbian and other 'deviant' themes. It is likely that the increased freedom of the press in *Reformasi* Indonesia,²⁴ combined with the media spotlight on celebrity authors such as Ayu Utami and Djenar Maesa Ayu, may have provided the momentum for some lesbian writers to appear in print. The pioneer was Ratri M., with her collection of stories *Lines* (2000).

Gayatri (PC March 2006) proposes that several other works that followed the success of *Lines* may have traded on the theme of lesbianism as a 'selling point', rather than being a serious literary investigation of lesbianism by lesbian authors. This may also apply to other 'deviant' themes with sensationalist potential, such as sadomasochism, transvestitism and transsexuality, for example, the novel *Ode untuk Leopold von Sacher-Masoch* (Ode to Leopold von Sacher-Masoch) by Dinar Rahayu, 2002.

Apart from *Lines*, recent literary works with lesbian themes include two novels: *Garis Tepi Seorang Lesbian* (The Margins of a Lesbian), by Herlinatiens, 2003, and *Nayla*, by Djenar Maesa Ayu, 2005, which traverses a number of relationships, including a lesbian partnership of two years. Ayu Utami's novels *Saman* (1998) and *Larung* (2001), which feature the bisexual character Shakuntala, were forerunners to these works. There are also lesbian characters in Oka Rusmini's novel *Tarian Bumi* (2000) and in Linda Kristanty's story 'Lubang Hitam' (in the collection *Kuda Terbang Maria Pinto*, 2004) but they make brief appearances only and are marginal to the main themes of the writers.

²³ Mira W., 1984, *Relung-relung Gelap Hati Sisi*, Gramedia, Jakarta. I have not located a copy of this novel. The summary is by BJD Gayatri. Maier (2004: 433) refers to an earlier novel with a lesbian theme, *Masa Remaja yang Hilang*, by Abdullah Harahap (1977). Apparently this novel takes a stereotypical view, linking lesbianism with narcotics and in general, moral decline.

²⁴ *Reformasi* Indonesia: The post-Suharto period, commencing in 1998

It likely that many literary works with lesbian themes remain unpublished, and in the return to cultural conservatism heralded by Indonesia's new anti-pornography laws, they may not be published in the near future.

Lines: An Insider Text; A Spectrum of Connections

'Lines' is a code word for lesbian, while the full title, *Lines: Kumpulan Cerita Perempuan di Garis Pinggir* (Lines: A Collection of Stories of Women on the Margins, 2000) reinforces the outsider status of lesbians in Indonesian society. Not only is Ratri M. a pseudonym, but her book was not publicly launched, thus avoiding the media hype that accompanied the appearance of Herlinatien's novel *Garis Tepi Seorang Lesbian* three years later.²⁵ However, Ratri's book sold out soon after publication, suggesting that it is an 'insider' text, seeking neither to highlight the author as celebrity nor to sensationalize lesbian themes. The 23 stories are grouped under three thematic headings: Kasih (Affection / Love); Keraguan (Doubt / Hesitation); and Penentuan (Certainty).²⁶

The writing is unpretentious and unprotesting, and the themes are treated with sensitivity and humour. As well as lesbians, *Lines* includes heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual men and women. The world portrayed is mainly middle-class, urban and privileged; the characters are from affluent backgrounds, well educated, politically aware and successful in their careers. The characters are models, interior designers, or marketing and advertising executives; they own cars, apartments and mobile phones. Some still live at home, their sexual orientation hidden from their families, which in several cases creates major tensions and misunderstandings, centred on expectations of compulsory heterosexuality and conventional marriage. The reasons for choosing woman-centred relationships are various: an early disposition to be attracted to other women, or the discovery of a peaceful haven at the end of a painful journey of violence and non-acceptance within family or marriage. The spectrum of connections is also varied, from schoolgirl crushes on teachers or lecturers, to a lesbian cross-cultural marriage in Copenhagen.

Some issues that arise in *Lines* are common to all types of relationships: juvenile crushes, unrequited love and longing, abandonment, the difficulties of long-distance and cross-cultural liaisons. Others are specific to lesbians; the concealing of sexual identity from the family, the contracting of sham marriages to please parents, the loss

²⁵ BJD Gayatri, PC, March 2006

²⁶ Translations from *Lines* are by the present writer.

of a partner to the heterosexual world, either by parental pressure or choice. The larger issues are universal ones: love, commitment, trust, and fidelity.

Not all the woman-centred relationships are fully sexually realized, although this in no way diminishes their importance to the protagonists. The most poignant story is “Sebait Kidung” (A Verse of Poetry). Iin, a married woman and marketing executive, forms a close relationship with Andria, her personal assistant. This relationship, described as pure, sincere and unsullied by lust (Lines: 40) becomes a refuge from a violent and abusive husband. The jealous accusations of Iin’s husband separate the two friends. His death in a car accident apparently clears a space for the two friends to continue their platonic and deeply emotional relationship. In the end, however, the women sacrifice their personal happiness to care for their respective mothers.

There are also stories with a twist that destabilize the classic boy-meets-girl romance: in “Ombak dan Pasir” (The Waves and the Sand) the growing friendship between Bintari, a young woman from Surabaya and Edmon, a young man from Canada, who meet on the beach in Bali, is transformed when they admit to one another that they are gay. Similarly, in “Berbagi” (Sharing) the apparent romance that develops between Anik, a young waitress in a café, and Danu, one of her customers, is revealed to have a homosexual rather than a heterosexual sub-plot, involving the café boss and his wife.

The outcomes and ‘solutions’ are also variable. One of the characters calmly decides to commit suicide (“Keputusannya” / The Decision). Two others find an outlet for their feelings in religion; another opts for celibacy (“Caroline, Anisa dan Utari”). Another, after experiencing various intimate relationships, decides on a life of independence as a bachelor girl (“Sepotong Rumah Impian” / Dream House).

It is predictable that the issue of marriage appears frequently in these stories, either as a spectre that divides the women protagonists and their families, or, ironically, as a celebration of the relationships between lesbians. The most complex scenario, “Perjanjian” (Promise), a total mockery of the marriage code, involves four friends: Norman and Alex, a gay male couple, and Nita and Hanny, lesbian partners. Norman and Nita agree to marry to satisfy their families, although Nita is somewhat uncomfortable about the hypocrisy of a church marriage. However, when Nita suggests to Hanny that she marries Alex for convenience, Hanny resists:

“Oh no, stop right now, getting that idea again. From the first it’s been me that’s been the most bothered by being asked to go through with that sort of marriage. For me, living like this is complicated enough. Let alone adding to the burden by a kind of ‘charade marriage’... She knew that Hanny’s efforts to get married were because of a moral responsibility to her parents who loved her and hoped that their youngest daughter would set up her own household some day. Whereas, Nita’s parents knew the truth about the way of life their favourite child had chosen. So even Hanny couldn’t blame her if she finally chose the path of compromise. [Lines: 194]²⁷

Shakuntala: The Duality of Gender

The character Shakuntala in Ayu Utami’s novel *Saman* (1998) and its sequel *Larung*, (2001) ²⁸ is one of four young, privileged professional women who have been friends since high school. Three of the women are involved in heterosexual relationships with men. Laila is a virgin who has romantic escapades with a married man, Yasmin, a married woman who becomes romantically involved with the activist priest Saman, and Cok is unselfconsciously promiscuous. Shakuntala is a dancer, and the only member of the group who engages in bisexual activities. She introduces herself as follows:

My name is Shakuntala. My father and my sister call me a whore because I’ve slept with a number of men and a number of women (even though I’ve never asked them to pay). My sister and my father don’t respect me. I don’t respect them. (Utami 1998: 115 / 2005: 110) ²⁹

Throughout *Saman*, Shakuntala contributes a blasé, world-weary commentary on the sexual activities of her three friends, and the prescriptions of her family on marriage and virginity. Yet the reader never learns the intimate details of her sexual relationships in ‘real time’. There is her account of destroying her own virginity at the age of nine by tearing out her hymen with a teaspoon. There are also mythologized

²⁷ “Aduh, stop deh punya ide semacam itu. Dari dulu saya paling berkeberatan kalau diminta menjalani perkawinan semacam itu. Buat aku hidup begini sudah cukup rumit. Tidak lagi deh dengan ditambahi beban untuk sebetulnya ‘pernikahan sandiwara’ semacam itu...” Dirinya tahu, bagaimana upaya Hanny untuk menikah lebih karena tanggung jawab moralnya kepada kedua orang tua yang demikian sayang dan mengharapkan si bungsu tersebut berumah tangga. Meskipun sesungguhnya orang tua Nita pun sudah tahu bagaimana sebenarnya pilihan jalan hidup anak kesayangannya itu. Sehingga Hanny pun tak bisa menyalahkan bila ada jalan kompromi yang akhirnya coba ditempuh Nita.

²⁸ English translations from *Saman* are by Pamela Allen, (Utami, 2005). English translations from *Larung* are by the present writer.

²⁹ Namaku Shakuntala. Ayah dan kakak perempuanku menyebutku sundal. Sebab aku telah tidur dengan beberapa lelaki dan beberapa perempuan. Meski tidak menarik bayaran. Kakak dan ayahku tidak menghormatiku. Aku tidak menghormati mereka.

(or fantasized) tales of her relationships with various foreign 'ogres' while she is a young girl.

Apart from these episodes, Shakuntala explores the range and diversity of her persona by dancing and by mimesis, dramatizing the roles of men as well as women:

I'm an expert at imitation. Sometimes I'm the Ramayana monkey-king Sugriwa, complete with low guttural growl. Other times I'm Cangik, whose slow, sluggish voice somehow seems to suit the flabby skin around her armpits. When I was a teenager I always used to dance as Arjuna in the *wayang orang* and all the girls would idolize me because, without realizing it, they saw no signs of femininity in me. But I was also Drupadi, who ignites the passion of all five Pandawa brothers. (Utami 1998: 117–118 / 2005: 112)³⁰

There is a sense of self-containment in Shakuntala. She resists her name being split in two, or being obliged to use her father's name when applying for a visa to travel overseas. As part of this completeness she recognizes both masculine and feminine aspects within the one body. This idea is further explored in *Larung*:

I have only one name: Shakuntala. Yet I often feel that there are two people inside me. A woman, and a man, who share a name that neither of them chose. I forget when I was first aware that I was a girl, just as we don't recall our first memory... But the male within me appeared one day. No one told me, and he didn't introduce himself, but I knew he was the man within myself... He loved me. He kissed my face and caressed my back. And he didn't go away (Utami 2001: 133-134).³¹

In *Larung*, the reader gets a picture of Shakuntala as a physical being: androgynous, lean, with a shaven head and a flat chest.

³⁰ Aku mahir mengubah suaraku. Kadang aku ini kera Sugriwa dengan geram egresif maupun ingresif dalam trachea. Kali lain aku adalah Cangik yang suaranya yang klemak-klemek seperti kulit ketiak yang lembek. Ketika remaja aku selalu menari sebagai Arjuna dalam Wayang Orang, dan gadis-gadis memujaku sebab tanpa sadar mereka tak menemukan sisa-sisa femininitas dalam diriku. Tapi aku juga Drupadi, yang memurubkan gairah pada kelima pandawa.

³¹ Namaku hanya satu: Shakuntala. Tapi sering aku merasa ada dua dalam diriku. Seorang perempuan, seorang lelaki, yang saling berbagi sebuah nama yang tak mereka pilih. Aku lupa sejak kapan kutahu bahwa aku anak perempuan, sama seperti kita lupa kapan kita pertama kali ingat... Tetapi lelaki dalam diriku datang suatu hari. Tak ada yang memberi tahu dan ia tak memperkenalkan diri, tapi kutahu dia adalah diriku laki-laki... Ia mencintaiku. Ia mencium di wajah dan mengelus di punggung. Dan ia tidak pergi.

She wore only blue mascara, like an accent on a monochrome earth-coloured painting, reminding Laila of a Paul Klee painting: the colour of the desert with a chink of sky. Her shaved head emphasized the bone structure in her narrow face, her slender neck and sturdy shoulders. She had hung her jacket on the seat and wore only a singlet; Laila could see her flat chest and the intertwined biceps and triceps weaving down her arms. (Utami 2001: 118) ³²

Shakuntala's sexual experience with other women is disembodied: she describes it as the man within her emerging and taking over, while she is a spectator to the act: So while there are two beings within her, they act independently.

She describes her experience with a pesindhen (female singer) as follows:

One evening, as I sat in a room admiring her singing without accompaniment, the man within appeared from behind my body like released energy. I said nothing to him, but the pesindhen saw him, and the two of them sang together. Then they approached one another and embraced. They took off their clothes and pressed close to one another. Then they said to each other, 'How beautiful. We both have breasts.' (Utami 2001: 149)³³

The most significant erotic episode involving Shakuntala starts as a flirtation with Laila, and is an expression of friendship and compassion: Tala tries to explain to Laila the duality of gender that exists within all people. She teaches Laila the tango, taking the man's role. And in the process of the dance, which lasts for one hour, Laila's perceptions of gender blur. In Tala she sees a reflection of the men she has loved: Saman and Sihar.

The lights were low. Our faces were turned to the side, but I could glimpse her profile, cheekbones, her short hair, from the corner of my eye, as a blurred image. And as my eyes were increasingly unable to fix this image because of our movement and the dim

³² Ia hanya memakai maskara biru yang nampak seperti aksan pada sebuah lukisan monokrom warna tanah, atau mengingatkan Laila pada sebuah gambar Paul Klee: warna padang pasir dan secelah langit. Rambut yang kini tercukur membuat tulang-tulang tirus wajah Shakuntala menonjol. Juga lehernya yang kurus dan bahunya yang kokoh. Ia telah menyampirkan jaketnya pada bangku dan kini hanya mengenakan singlet sehingga Laila bisa melihat dadanya yang rata dan serabut biseps dan triseps lengannya yang berjalinan.

³³ Suatu malam, ketika aku duduk dalam sebuah ruang dan mengagumi dia menyanyi tanpa pengiring, lelaki dalam diriku muncul dari belakang tubuhku seperti energi yang lepas. Aku tidak bicara dengannya tetapi si pesindhen melihatnya lalu mereka menembang bersama. Lalu mereka berdekatan, berdekapan. Mereka melepas kain masing-masing dan saling berlekatan. Setelah itu mereka saling berkata, "Betapa indahnyanya. Kita sama-sama punya payudara."

light, her face increasingly merged with the face of Sihar, and sometimes that of Saman. Just like a delayed exposure photo, all was in flux. (Utami 2001: 131) ³⁴

Tala completes the story:

You lay beside me, and I saw the tears flowing from your eyes and disappearing into your hair. Like the bitterness from the accumulated disappointment that you tried to hide from me. Like the passion that you tried to hold back. Like the fear that you did not admit to. I stroked your back and kissed your forehead. And I didn't leave you. I knew that you had never experienced orgasm. Even when you had been making love with him. Now I wouldn't let you meet that man before you had that experience. Before you knew your own body. Only then, could you go. (Utami 2001: 153) ³⁵

The consummation of this episode is not conveyed directly. Utami uses a celebratory metaphor for the female organ / orgasm, a carnivorous flower, tropical, lush and dripping with juices, (perhaps a parody of the myth of the devouring female). Through friendship with a woman, Laila has discovered the connection and fulfilment that has been missing in her relationships with men. ³⁶

Herlinatiens: Authorial Ambiguities

Herlinatiens (Herlina Tien Suhesti, born Ngawi, East Java in 1982) is a young, Islamic woman who at the time of the publication of her controversial novel *Garis Tepi Seorang Lesbian* (The Margins of a Lesbian, 2003) ³⁷ was a student of language and literature at Universitas Negeri, Yogyakarta. She is also a writer of poetry, essays and short stories and has received awards both at local and national levels for her writing, some of which has been published in the mass media.

³⁴ Cahaya termaram. Wajah kami saling membuang, namun profilnya, hidung, tulang pipi, rambut pendeknya, terasa lewat sudut mata sebagai citra yang samar. Semakin tak sanggup mata saya menangkap bayangan itu karena gerakan dan cahaya rendah, semakin bercampur wajah Sihar, terkadang Saman, di sana. Seperti dalam sebuah foto dengan kecepatan bawah, segalanya adalah aliran.

³⁵ Kamu berbaring di sisiku dan kulihat air mengalir dari matamu ke arah rambut. Dan menghilang dalam rambut. Seperti kepahitan dari tumpukan kekecewaan yang kamu coba sembunyikan. Seperti gairah-gairah yang kamu coba kekang. Seperti ketakutan yang tak kamu akui. Kupeluk kamu. Aku mengelus di punggung dan mencium di kening. Dan aku tidak pergi. Aku tahu kamu belum pernah mengalami orgasme. Juga ketika bercumbu dengannya. Kini tak kubiarkan kamu menemui lelaki itu sebelum kamu mengetahuinya. Sebelum kamu mengenali tubuhmu sendiri. Setelah ini kamu boleh pergi.

³⁶ See Kris Budiman, 2003, *Jurnal Perempuan* 30: 11 – 18, for a discussion of Shakuntala's bisexuality.

³⁷ Translations from *Garis Tepi Seorang Lesbian* are by the present writer.

While the Yogyakarta launch of Oetomo's book *Memberi Suara Pada yang Bisu* in 2001 was closed by the police, Herlinatiens' novel about lesbian lovers was launched in 2003 before more than 500 guests at a State Islamic tertiary educational institution (IAIN) in the same city with no bans or protests (Graham: 2003: 33).³⁸

Herlinatiens presents an ambivalent image as an author: on the one hand as a sympathetic 'outsider' who has researched lesbianism thoroughly for her novel, and still refers to the gay community as 'mereka' (them). On the other hand, she provokes speculation by way of parallels between her own biography and the story of the main protagonist. In the first paragraph of her preface she describes herself as motivated by curiosity, a social voyeur, looking at 'a world that is overripe, hidden... but always enjoyable to be spied on by others' (Herlinatiens 2003: xiii)³⁹

When she was at university, she came across a website containing several articles about homosexuality, and 'became interested in understanding the significance of their lives'. (Herlinatiens: xiii) Why was she interested? She believes that God created many kinds of relationships between human beings, and that we should respect the choices of others (Herlinatiens 2003: xiv). While she says that there are real-life situations that are close to her novel, nevertheless it is still a work of fiction. (Herlinatiens 2003: xvi)

Herlinatiens admits to considerable personal stress and unhappiness caused by insinuations of lesbianism encountered while she was writing the novel. This is not surprising, considering her youth, her adherence to Islam, and her closeness to her family.

The people round me pestered me with all sorts of insinuations and claims that attempted to corner me while I was in the process of writing. Obviously one of them was that I was a lesbian. This almost made me reluctant to finish my writing; however I finally completed it in three weeks, although I became ill for five days as the result of stress. (Herlinatiens 2003: xvi)⁴⁰

³⁸ See *Jurnal Perempuan* 30, 2003: 138 – 140, for a review of *Garis Tepi Seorang Lesbian*

³⁹ ... sebuah dunia yang ranum, tersembunyi, dikoyak, tapi selalu asyik untuk diintip oleh orang lain.

⁴⁰ Orang-orang di sekitar saya mencoba mencecar saya dengan banyak hal dan klaim-klaim yang memojokkan saya selama tulisan ini saya buat. Tudingan saya seorang lesbian jelas ada, ini hampir saja membuat saya bimbang untuk menyelesaikan tulisan ini, namun akhirnya dalam waktu tiga minggu saya telah mengkhatakannya, itupun sudah termasuk sakit selama lima hari karena stres.

There are several parallels between Herlinatiens and her main character Ashmora Paria. Paria discovers information on the Internet about lesbianism (as does the author), is active in a non-government organization for women, and wins awards for her writing, including a trip to Japan. Another parallel is the devotion of the author and the main character to their religion. These parallels are bound to invite questions from the reader, as will the foreword by Saskia Wieringa, a well-known academic and 'insider' writer on lesbian issues from Holland. Herlinatiens, who has become 'something of a cult leader among many young women', says that her book 'resonates with young Muslims because homosexuality is a real issue in the sex-segregated *pesantren*.'⁴¹ (Graham 2003: 33)

The novel, which does not have a linear chronology, relates the love affair of two affluent and educated lesbian lovers in the twenty-first century, who married in Paris two years previously. The narrative is in the form of letters (or emails) from the main protagonist, Ashmora Paria, to her lover Rie Shiva Ashvagosa, and to two friends, Rafael and Gita, with whom she shares her unhappiness and thoughts about lesbianism and society. The letters to Rafael and Gita contain most of the intellectual content of the novel: contextualizing lesbianism relationships by way of snippets of lesbian history and philosophy.

Their parents have separated the lovers; Rie has been married to a man, and is still in Paris, while Paria has returned to Indonesia. Her career as a film-maker has been adversely affected by gossip about her lesbianism, and she feels guilty about the effect that her sexual preference has on her ailing father.

The character of Pariah is not a sympathetic one; she is cold and calculating and uses both men and women without much consideration for their happiness. Her only concern is to be reunited with her partner Rie, for whom she nurtures an obsessive and compulsive love that will admit no one else, including any children of the marriage (distaste for childbirth / children is a common feature of lesbianism).

Meanwhile, while professing her exclusive and eternal love for Rie, she has sexual relationships with other women, whom she discards when it suits her. After losing hope of being reunited with Rie she decides to contract a marriage of convenience with Mahendra, the brother of one of her lovers (Devi). She even traps Mahendra into having sex with her and threatens to use a video of the event to destroy his

⁴¹ *Pesantren*: Islamic boarding school

reputation unless he agrees to marry her. Finally, Paria receives a letter from Rie and escapes to join her in Paris just a few days before the planned wedding. Rie is dying of leukaemia, a melodramatic end to a long, self-indulgent and neurotic obsession.

Although Paria resigns herself to a heterosexual marriage, she admits it is not without compensations, especially those of being accepted in the patriarchal world. But instead of accepting her mother's choice, a previous suitor who is now widowed with two children, she resists by choosing Mahendra, although he is engaged to be married. Paria finds some satisfaction in 'passing', even in the eyes of her future mother-in-law, who refuses to believe that Paria could be a lesbian, exhibiting the usual stereotyped ideas about what lesbians are like.

In her eyes, it wasn't possible for a clever and well-spoken woman to be a lesbian. To her, a lesbian was an ignorant and uncultured person who had neither ethics nor manners... It was she who was stupid, and everyone like her, who thought homosexuals were a group that had failed in life and who thought of nothing but sex to the exclusion of all the ethics in the world. (Herlinatiens: 249) ⁴²

This novel is a journal of a lesbian journey, from the first teenage kiss to the first meeting with the beloved, to the separation, uncertainty and waiting, to their final reunion in Paris. But the framework of the lesbian relationship fails to hold the present writer's attention: perhaps because it is repetitive and one-sided – the reader rarely hears the absent Rie's voice. To this extent it is no different from a narrative written by an egocentric, possessive and exploitative character of any sexual persuasion.

According to J. A. Yak, who wrote the epilogue, one of the major strengths of the novel is that its main character, Paria, remains grounded in the patriarchal world, and therefore faces greater challenges than do separatist lesbians. Yak poses the question: 'Is Paria a genuine lesbian, or only a sensation-seeking adventurer?'

She has the courage to keep living in the context of heterosexual society, and to face considerable temptations that could pose a threat to her identity as a lesbian. This is

⁴² Di matanya, seorang perempuan yang halus tutur katanya dan cerdas tidak mungkin menjadi lesbian. Buatnya, lesbian adalah manusia bodoh yang kasar dan tidak punya etika juga sopan santun... Bodohnya dia dan bodohnya pula orang-orang seperti dia. Yang menganggap homoseks adalah kumpulan orang-orang yang gagal dalam hidup, yang pikirannya nge-seks melulu hingga melupakan segala etika dunia.

because she wants to acknowledge the fact that her existence derives from her 'father', and for that 'father' she will consider marriage. Because of that, I value Paria as a lesbian who is assured of her lesbianism; she faces great challenges to her identity as a lesbian with the firmness of spirit of a lesbian... So, this is truly a novel about a lesbian. (J. A. Yak, *Epilog*, Herlinatiens: 312) ⁴³

I would agree that *Garis Tepi Seorang Lesbian* is an unambiguous lesbian text, with lesbian content. A lesbian relationship is at the centre of the narrative, and it is presumably intended for a lesbian readership. In terms of agency, Paria resists the pressures of her friends and family to conform to compulsory heterosexuality. The main obstacles to the relationship are the expectations of family. The main patriarchal figures with whom Paria must contend are her father and her prospective husband Mahendra. Ironically, it is Paria's devotion to her father that is the source of most of her personal conflict in the novel. The same is true for Rie:

'As an only child, I am really afraid to disappoint my parents.'

'What do you mean?'

'Yes, Paria, I don't want to be called a disobedient child. But what about my feelings? I love you, and I want to be with you always.' Then we embraced and shed some tears.

I loved her, she loved me. End of story. (Herlinatiens: 113) ⁴⁴

Herlinatiens' sexual orientation has been much debated, but the author declines to make a definitive statement about this. She says that whether she is a lesbian or not is not relevant, and that 'Society has to accept that there are multiple ways of loving' (Graham 2003: 33). Her reluctance to reveal her position is probably an acknowledgement of the deviant status of lesbians in Indonesian society, as well as a defensive strategy for survival in a society that is hostile to manifestations of sexuality (especially female sexuality) outside the narrow parameters of compulsory heterosexuality and marriage.

⁴³ Ia tetap berani hidup dalam konteks masyarakat heteroseksual, dan berani menghadapi godaan-godaannya besar, yang dapat mengancam kediriannya sebagai lesbian. Itulah sebabnya ia mau mengakui kenyataan bahwa keberadaan dirinya adalah dari seorang "ayah", dan demi "ayah" itulah ia sempat berpikir untuk menikah. Oleh karena itu, saya menilai Paria adalah seorang lesbian yang yakin akan kelesbiannya; tantangan-tantangan berat terhadap kediriannya sebagai lesbian ia hadapi dengan keteguhan hati seorang lesbian... Jadi, ini memang benar-benar novel mengenai lesbian.

⁴⁴ "Sebagai anak tunggal aku sangat takut mengecewakan kedua orang tuaku." "Maksud kamu?" "Ya Paria, aku tak mau disebut anak durhaka. Tapi bagaimana dengan perasaanku? Aku mencintaimu, dan ingin selalu bersamamu." Lalu kami berpelukkan dalam tangis. Aku mencintainya, dia mencintaiku. Selesai.

Nayla: Rediscovering the Mother

Djenar Maesa Ayu's novel *Nayla* (2005)⁴⁵ explores the main character's intersecting relationships with her mother, father, stepmother and lovers, both men and women. I focus here on the lesbian relationship with Juli.

First, I give a brief background to Nayla's experience, which is not presented as a continuous narrative, moving backwards and forwards in time, and from one episode and mode of communication to another: personal journals, letters, interviews, phone calls, text messages, and media headlines. The novel spans Nayla's life from the age of nine to 25. The only child of a well-known and affluent family, she survives an absent father, maternal torture as a punishment for bed-wetting by having her genitals pierced with safety pins, rape, the death of her father, rejection by both her mother and stepmother, incarceration in a rehabilitation home for delinquent girls on a trumped-up charge of drug use, and several years on the streets. She finally ends up in a nightclub in Jakarta where she is trained as a lighting expert and chorus line dancer.

Nayla's memories of her past life are of powerlessness that she is afraid to expose to anyone, a lack of agency. Therefore she tries not to depend on anyone, and to retain her independence.

I was afraid to appear powerless. I was afraid that any knowledge of my powerlessness would be manipulated. Like my powerlessness with Uncle Indra who had raped me. Like my powerlessness against the safety pins in Mother's hands, with which she pierced my genitals and my vagina. Against the excrement in Mother's hands that she had plastered on my mouth. Against Father's death. Towards the Home for the Rehabilitation of Delinquent and Drug-addicted Children where I had been cast away. And my criminal activities and the phone call from the Police that had embarrassed Mother. Powerless against the cold, wet nights. Wet with tears. Wet with sweat. Wet with everything wet, including the rain that I couldn't avoid because I had no home, not even a place to stay. (Djenar 2005: 147)⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Translations from *Nayla* are by the present writer.

⁴⁶ Saya takut kelihatan tidak berdaya. Saya takut ketidakberdayaan saya dimanipulasinya. Seperti ketidakberdayaan saya pada Om Indra yang telah memperkosa saya. Seperti ketidakberdayaan saya pada peniti di tangan Ibu yang menusuk selangkangan dan vagina saya. Pada tahi di tangan Ibu yang ditempelkannya ke mulut saya. Pada kematian Ayah. Pada Rumah Perawatan Anak Nakal dan Narkotika di mana saya dijejloskan. Pada tindak-tanduk kriminal dan telepon dari Polsek yang membuat Ibu jengah. Pada malam-malam dingin yang basah. Basah oleh air mata. Basah oleh peluh. Basah oleh segala basah, juga hujan yang tak bisa saya hindari karena tak punya rumah, bahkan hanya sekadar tempat singgah.

In the nightclub she meets Juli, a DJ in the discotheque, a lesbian who is ten years older than Nayla. The dynamic between Nayla and Juli is based on Juli's desire to rescue and nurture Nayla, and Nayla's need to experience a 'normal' mother-daughter relationship. In a letter to her mother she says, 'Men are only for *hit and run*... But in the matter of feelings, I feel more comfortable with a woman. Whether it's right or wrong, I rediscover you within them. I miss you.' (Djenar 2005: 54 - 55) ⁴⁷

Nayla admits that with Juli, she is able to experience the warm affection that in the past, she had longed to give to her mother. On the other hand, she is annoyed by Juli's protective attitude:

In her eyes, I was just a girl of fourteen who was frustrated and in the process of finding herself. Although I was capable of loving and making love. I wanted to learn how to feel. But I didn't want to give my love to anyone who didn't deserve to receive it. It was better that I chose to love Juli than the men who were just after my virginity. (Djenar 2005: 6) ⁴⁸

After they have been lovers for a week, Juli invites Nayla to live with her, but Nayla receives the offer with indifference. When Juli asks her for a pledge of faithfulness, and asks her if she is a lesbian, the reply is unexpected:

'My darling, I am not a lover of women. I am not a lesbian. But I am a lover of life. And I will be faithful to life.' (Djenar 2005: 68) ⁴⁹

It is clear that after a childhood of being exploited and being afraid of others, especially of her mother, Nayla is learning to take control of her life and make her own decisions, as well as resisting being labelled.

From the time she is with Juli, Nayla begins to write about her feelings about sexuality. She also discovers her own body through the sexual relationship with a

⁴⁷ Yang laki-laki cuma untuk *hit and run*... Tapi untuk urusan perasaan, saya lebih merasa nyaman dengan perempuan. Entah salah atau benar, aya menemukan Ibu di dalam dirinya. Saya rindu Ibu.

⁴⁸ Di matanya, saya hanyalah perempuan berumur empat belas tahun yang frustrasi dan sedang mencari jati diri. Padahal saya mampu mencinta dan bercinta. Saya ingin belajar merasa. Tapi saya tak ingin memberi cinta saya kepada orang-orang yang tak semestinya menerima. Lebih baik saya memilih mencintai Juli ketimbang laki-laki yang menginginkan selaput dara saja.

⁴⁹ Yangku, saya bukan pencinta perempuan. Saya bukan lesbian. Tapi saya pencinta kehidupan. Dan saya akan setia pada kehidupan.

woman; the emotional and physical satisfaction, communication and openness that she has never felt with a man. (Djenar 2005: 82-83).

Martha Vicinus (1993: 438) uses the term 'Sapphic fairy tale'⁵⁰ for relationships of this type, 'the common variation on romantic friendship in which an older woman teaches a younger woman about sexual desire and life; in most cases the relationship is brief, as the younger woman outgrows her initial attraction.'

Eventually Juli becomes jealous of Nayla's popularity with the guests at the discotheque and begins to watch her closely. Nayla admits her great debt towards Juli, and the feeling of emotional stability and financial security that the relationship has given her. But she needs to have some freedom in sexual matters, particularly to experiment in having sex with men. Her attempts to establish an open relationship are ignored. So Nayla is forced to be deceitful, having sex with men on the nights that she dances at a hotel. Finally Juli breaks off the relationship and returns to Bandung. Juli's ambivalence towards masculinity, including that which she embodies, is expressed thus:

Juli's hatred towards men increased with time. She hated the male spirit that flowed within her female body. But Juli couldn't hate her woman's body because she loved the body of a woman. Juli hated the male spirit that flowed within the body of a man. A body that would never be hers. Bodies that would always compete with her. Bodies that would always rob her of her sweetheart. Bodies that distanced Juli from her family. A family that was normal because their souls were in accordance with their bodies. (Djenar 2005: 102 - 103).⁵¹

Does Nayla's experimentation with men or her later relationship with Ben negate her relationship with Juli? In my opinion the relationship with Juli is equally important, and while it lasts, it is a true lesbian partnership, both physically and emotionally. Her relationship with Ben ends for similar reasons: Nayla's infidelities with other men, her heavy drinking, her independent attitude and her dedication to her writing.

⁵⁰ According to Vicinus, Elaine Marks invented the term 'Sapphic fairy tale'. (Elaine Marks, 'Lesbian Intertextuality', in *Homosexualities and French Literature*, ed. G. Stambolian and E. Marks, Ithaca, NY: 356 - 358).

⁵¹ Kebencian Juli terhadap laki-laki makin menjadi-jadi. Ia benci dengan jiwa laki-laki yang mengalir di dalam tubuhnya yang perempuan. Tapi Juli tak bisa membenci tubuh perempuannya karena ia mencintai tubuh perempuan. Juli benci dengan jiwa laki-laki yang mengalir di dalam tubuh laki-laki. Tubuh yang tak pernah bisa menjadi miliknya. Tubuh-tubuh itu yang selalu menyainginya. Tubuh-tubuh itu yang selalu merampas kekasihnya. Tubuh-tubuh itu yang menjauhkan Juli dari keluarganya. Keluarga yang normal karena berjiwa sesuai dengan penampilan tubuhnya.

With Juli she has been able to recreate the maternal love that she has never had from a selfish and sadistic mother.

The significance of the above literary works is that, although not all the protagonists are self-identified lesbians, (some, for example Shakuntala, are bisexual, and Roro Mendut has no conflict between her erotic activities with Gendhuk Duku and her heterosexual relationship with Pronocitro), is that they create a narrative space for woman-centred relationships within the dominant heterosexist literary culture of Indonesia, with its insistence on the inseparability of complementary sexual and gender binaries. Some writers (Mangunwijaya, Utami, Djenar) locate this space within the framework of heterosexuality; others (Ratri M., Herlinatiens) speak from the margins of the patriarchal order.⁵²

Of the women discussed in this thesis, lesbians are the group that is the most unprecedented, as well as the most marginalized and isolated. Connie Chan (1996: 94), writing of East Asian-American lesbians, distinguishes between private and public personas: 'The public self is that which conforms to gendered and familial role expectations and seeks to avoid actions which would bring shame not only upon oneself but also upon one's family'.⁵³ Evelyn Blackwood (1996: 197) also raises questions about 'the usefulness of a Euroamerican-dominated concept of lesbian identity'. She argues that:

If we are to develop successfully an international focus to lesbian studies, we need to set aside our own assumptions about the categories of sex, sexuality, intimacy, and women-women relationships. We need to recognize the complexities of sexualities and identities in a postcolonial world, a world in which emerging lesbian and gay activists are forging new identities that both accommodate and resist traditional and imposed conceptions of sexuality. (idem: 199) ⁵⁴

Mien Sughandi's remarks cited earlier in this chapter are undeniable evidence that lesbians in Indonesia have no acknowledged "official" identity, as they do not fulfil the reproductive and sexual obligations that are the basis of *kodrat*. They do not provide compulsory or traditional services to men as sexual objects (prostitutes /

⁵² See Farwell, 1990: 91 – 103 for the subversive potential of such narratives, which allow subtexts of female desire to contest the hierarchy implied by gender-linked dualisms.

⁵³ While Chan's essay relates to East Asian-American lesbians, her observations are also relevant to Southeast Asian women, including Indonesian lesbians.

⁵⁴ See Ong, A. 1988. "Colonialism and Modernity: Feminist Re-presentations of Women in Non-Western Societies". *Inscriptions* 3/7: 79 – 93, for similar arguments about Western feminists' approaches to women in non-Western cultures.

performers), or as wives or mistresses who voluntarily take care of their husband's domestic and sexual needs. In other words they are perceived as of no value to the patriarchy. As well as being subject to the restrictions on social mobility that are common to all women in Indonesia, they have an ambiguous, even antagonistic relationship not only with patriarchal / heterosexist power structures but also with the male gay movement and mainstream feminist activists. The statement by Jeumpa and Ulil cited as an epigraph to this chapter clearly reflects the Indonesian lesbian's dilemma.

Are lesbians and lesbian issues still isolated from mainstream feminist movements in Indonesia? According to Gayatri⁵⁵ the situation has not changed. Mainstream feminists are still afraid of being branded as lesbian, while lesbians still fear the social ostracism that 'coming out' entails. However, a new generation of lesbian activists is building on Gayatri's pioneering work. Chandra Kirana is still active, and Kamilia Manaf is establishing a Community of Indonesian Lesbians (Komunitas Lesbian Indonesia), as well as publishing a monthly leaflet with the intention of initiating a discourse about lesbians and associated issues such as discrimination (*Jurnal Perempuan* 41, 2005: 153).

* * * *

In the next chapter, I take an alternative approach to the presence of women in Indonesian literature: I present ten psychological 'case studies' of female characters drawn from selected literary works dating from 1896 to 1999, and analyse the strategies of silence, madness and death as literary devices employed either to punish women for transgressing (or attempting to transcend) their defined roles, or to deprive them of identity, agency, or a voice in determining their destinies in either the personal or political arena. In many cases these devices (as well as those of incarceration) lead to the narrative survival of the hero, and the marginalization or 'death of the heroine', either symbolically or in reality.

⁵⁵ Personal communication, March 2006

CHAPTER 6

SILENCE / MADNESS / DEATH

SETTING THE SCENE

'As the Romantic poets feared, too much imagination may be dangerous to anyone, male or female, but for women in particular patriarchal culture has always assumed mental exercises would have dire consequences.' (Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar 1997 (1979): 28) ¹

'Violating the rules results in muteness, madness, death or isolation' (Tineke Hellwig 1994: 204)

In this chapter I take an alternative approach to analysing the representation of women through ten "case histories" of female characters in selected works of Indonesian literature from 1896 to 1999. This will adopt (and parody) the 'authoritarian' approach of male 'professionals' by replacing the doctor / husband with another type of professional, the feminist reader, who exists outside the framework of the texts. Wal-Chee Dimock (1997: 639) suggests such an approach, where the alternative is the *virtual position* occupied by the implied reader, whose task it is 'to suggest an opening, a point of exit from the closed system of the text'.² Thus I will present my case histories from the point of view of 'professional' (pseudo-analyst) and feminist reader. My analyses will be mindful of the degree of agency which each character possesses; also the important question of the 'voice' (or 'voices') of the narrative.

In the absence of an Indonesian critical feminist discourse that overtly addresses these issues, I have been obliged to embed my analyses in theories from the West.³

¹ For example, Gilbert and Gubar 1997: 28, 'A thinking woman was considered such a breach of nature that a Harvard doctor reported during his autopsy on a Radcliffe graduate he discovered that her uterus had shrivelled to the size of a pea'.

² The pioneering essay that linked the issues of gender and reading was "A Map for Rereading: or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts" by Annette Kolodny (1980), *New Literary History* 11: 451 – 467, reprinted in Elaine Showalter 1985, *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on women, literature and theory*: 45 – 62, New York, Pantheon. Kolodny's article is discussed in detail in Dimock (1997).

³ See also Elaine Showalter 1987 (1985), *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830 – 1980*, for an extended and lucid study of women and madness.

Western feminist theorists, through their analyses of the patriarchal construction of western literary history, have critiqued the marginalization of women, both as characters in literature and as creative writers. The psychiatric devaluation of women can be traced to late eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, with the attribution of psychosomatic 'diseases' such as depression, agoraphobia, anorexia and hysteria to side effects of the female reproductive system, 'as if to elaborate on Aristotle's notion that femaleness was in and of itself a deformity' (Gilbert and Gubar 1997: 27).

In the nineteenth century, as Gilbert and Gubar continue, a 'cult of female invalidism' developed in England and America. Women, particularly upper-class women, were encouraged to be frail and sickly, the desired end result of an education in submissiveness, renunciation and self-repression.⁴ This suppression also extended to a perception of intellectual activity in women (for example reading and writing) as debilitating to the point of the loss of reason.

To the psychosomatic disorders associated with female physical and mental invalidism, Gilbert and Gubar (1997: 30) add those connected with communication, language and memory: aphasia (the loss of speech, or the restriction of language to a single repeated word or phrase) and amnesia (the loss of the past / a personal lineage / literary progenitors) as phenomena that appear frequently in women's writings – 'two illnesses which symbolically represent (and parody) the sort of intellectual incapacity patriarchal culture has traditionally required of women'.

The archetypal 'madwoman' in Gilbert and Gubar's book *The Madwoman in the Attic* is the 'non-lingual' Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre* (1847), later reclaimed by Jean Rhys in her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). They present her as a dark alter ego, the monster to Jane's angel. The description of Bertha in *Jane Eyre* as an apparition that blurs the boundaries deprives her of any claim to humanity, let alone to gender (Baym, 1997: 281-2)⁵.

In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild

⁴ For the relationship between women's maladies and the medical profession in nineteenth century America see Ehrenreich & English 1973, *Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness*, Westbury, NY, The Feminist Press.

⁵ 'Among Charlotte Brontë's outrages on her madwoman is the denial of ability to speak; Bertha will never get to tell her own story'. (Baym 1997: 282)

animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face. (Jane Eyre: Ch. 26)

According to Shosanna Felman (1997: 8) madness is not a form of rebellion, but rather 'the impasse confronting those whom cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protest or self-affirmation'. It is also subject to what she calls 'the major theoretical challenge of all contemporary thought', that is, its subordination to the binary opposition of the Masculine / Feminine framework, where Woman is always thought of as the Other. 'How can madness... be conceived outside of its dichotomous opposition to sanity, without being subjugated to reason?' (Felman 1997: 10)

Furthermore, in her essay "Woman and Madness" (first published in 1975) Felman develops the idea of 'The Therapeutic Fallacy'. In this situation, the woman's madness is appropriated by male 'authorities' such as husbands / lovers / doctors, who seek to 'restore' her sanity / reason, and with it, her socially defined femininity. Felman engages in an alternative analysis of a story by Balzac to illustrate the difficulty of conventional readings of female madness. This short story, entitled "Adieu", was originally published in 1830 and includes an aphasic madwoman, Stéphanie, and her peasant companion, a deaf-mute. Felman's interpretation is a paradigm, as 'the dichotomy Reason/Madness, as well as Speech/Silence, exactly coincides in this text with the dichotomy Men/Women. Women as such are associated both with madness and with silence, whereas men are associated with prerogatives of discourse and of reason'. (Felman 1997: 15)

Stéphanie's lover, Philippe, and her uncle, a doctor, seek to appropriate her madness, to 'restore her reason' and 'reinstate' her femininity – a quality that her companion Geneviève (described as an 'undefinable being') also lacks. In fact, by his strategy of re-producing the scene of the traumatic events that triggered her madness many years previously, Philippe kills her, thus conveniently bringing closure to the anxieties that have plagued him – particularly the fact that she does not 'recognize' him.

I have given Felman's analysis of this story in some detail because it embodies all the themes that are the subject of this chapter: Silence, Madness and Death. Together with analyses of the story "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman,

(Kolodny 1980; Showalter 1987; Dimock 1997)⁶ it has served as a model for my own feminist analyses of these themes in Indonesian literature.

Are there parallel themes in Indonesian literature? Are there female characters that are frail, sickly and depressed, or even reduced to psychosis by the conflicts caused by society's restrictive expectations of their roles? Will the feminist reader encounter women who have been deprived of their dignity and right to self-definition by male authority figures: authors, husbands, brothers, lovers or the military and medical professions? Are there characters that are restricted physically or even incarcerated in institutions? Or removed from the active pursuit of self-realization and power by the finality of death? That is what this chapter sets out to establish.

Although even the most dedicated feminist reader can not reverse tragic outcomes, at least such a reader can identify and interpret silences and gaps where a character does not speak at all, or has her speech mis-interpreted or censored through the agency of a male: author / hero / husband / brother / or professional.

Phyllis Chesler, the author of the important book, *Women and Madness*, succinctly summarizes women's cultural situation and its outcomes:

Women are impaled on the cross of self-sacrifice. Unlike men, they are categorically denied the experience of cultural supremacy and individuality. In different ways, some women are driven mad by this fact. Their madness is treated in such a way as to turn it into another form of self-sacrifice. Such madness is, in a sense, an intense experience of female sexual and cultural castration and a doomed search for potency. The search often involves "delusions" or displays of physical aggression, grandeur, sexuality and emotionality—all traits which would probably be more acceptable in pro-woman or female-dominated cultures. Such traits in women are feared and punished in patriarchal mental asylums. (Chesler 2005: 91)

⁶ "The Yellow Wallpaper", first published in 1891, is a story by the American writer and political activist Charlotte Perkins Gilman. It is based on the real life experience of the author, who was advised by a leading psychiatrist, Silas Weir Mitchell, to take a rest cure (enforced passivity) that restricted any form of intellectual activity, and excluded writing. The character in the story is controlled by a doctor/husband, who insists that he has superior knowledge of what is best for her: the female character is confined to a room where she becomes deranged and hallucinatory, seeing (and finally identifying with) female figures trapped behind the wallpaper. In the end, she ropes herself to the bed, and creeps around the room on all fours.

My inspiration for this ‘case study’ approach has been a volume of essays (Felman 1982) that engages in a dialogue between literature and psychiatry, in an attempt to see how each body of knowledge can illuminate the other. To quote Freud:

But creative writers are valuable allies and their evidence is to be prized highly, for they are apt to know a whole host of things between heaven and earth of which our philosophy has not yet let us dream. (Freud 1959: 8)

TEMPLATE FOR CASE STUDIES:

The template below is used to summarize ten case studies of women in Indonesian literature, giving “evidence” and “symptoms” from the texts, leading to my “diagnoses” of silence, madness and death.

CASE STUDY (NUMBER)
NAME:
PROFESSION:
TEXT / genre / publication date:
AUTHOR:
Case History and Evidence:
SYMPTOMS:
DIAGNOSIS:

CASE STUDIES:

CASE STUDY 1

NAME: MA BOEJOENG.

PROFESSION: Matchmaker

TEXTS: *Tjerita Njai Dasima. Soewatoe korban dari pada pemboedjoek* (1896); "Sair *tjerita di tempo Tahun 1813 soeda kadjadian di Batawi, terpoengoet tjeritanja dari Boekoe Njaie Dasima*" (2 versions, 1897)

AUTHORS: G. Francis (prose story, 1896); O.S. Tjiang (syair, 1897); Lie Kim Hok (syair, 1897)⁷

Case History:

Ma Boejoeng is engaged as an intermediary (by Samioen, a young man who is already married) to seduce a rich *nyai* (Dasima) away from her English *tuan*, Edward Williams. As Hellwig (1992: 7) comments, the greater part of the story is devoted to the attempts by Ma Boejoeng to persuade Nyai Dasima to leave her *tuan*. In this she is successful, with the collaboration of Samioen's wife, Mrs Hayati, and his mother, Saleha. Not only is Ma Boejoeng involved in this conspiracy, she also obtains drugs which she administers to Edward Williams and Nyai Dasima to undermine their will power and their sense of morality.

When the three women learn of Samioen's plan to murder Nyai Dasima, Saleha and Ma Boejoeng move to 'Kampong Melayu', therefore being only indirectly involved in the crime of murder.⁸ Although in the prose version by Francis, Ma Boejoeng admits to her part in the conspiracy, she is not punished for her actions. Apparently, however, there has been a re-writing of the ending in the two *syair* (poetic versions) of 1897, elaborating on Ma Boejoeng's fate. In both *syair*, the matchmaker goes mad, evidently a result of guilty feelings about her complicity in the crime, and eventually dies in prison.⁹

⁷ Prose story: *Tjerita Njai Dasima* by G. Francis, 1896, Indonesian text reproduced in Toer, *Tempo Doeloe* 1982. Translated to English by Harry Aveling (Francis 1988: 1). See Hellwig, 1992 for a discussion of the authorship and bibliographic details of the three versions of the story.

⁸ Francis 1988: 27

⁹ 'In feminist studies madness in women is linked with their inability to adapt themselves to, and their opposition against, standards set by men which rule society'. (Hellwig 1992: 12, n.16)

Evidence:

Ma Boejoeng went crazy
Day by day she became more deranged
Until she forgot to put on her clothes and sash
There was no one who wanted to visit her

Day by day Ma Boejoeng became madder
She forgot all shame and self-respect
Until she ate her own filth
And died in prison because of her meddlesome tongue. ¹⁰

(O.S. Tjiang, 1897, stanza 551-2, cited in Hellwig 1992: 11 - 12)

SYMPTOMS: Conspiracy, deceit, administering of magic potions, guilt.

DIAGNOSIS: MADNESS, IMPRISONMENT, DEATH

CASE STUDY 2

NAME: MEN NEGARA

PROFESSION: Warung proprietor and procuress

TEXT: *Sukreni Gadis Bali* (The Rape of Sukreni). Novel, 1936 ¹¹

AUTHOR: Anak Agung Pandji Tisna

Case History:

Men Negara is the owner of a *warung*, or coffee stall, in Bali. Her main bargaining power resides in her beautiful daughter Ni Negari, who is the bait that attracts men to

¹⁰ Mah Boejoeng gila boekan terbikin / Semingkin hari gila memingkin / Sampe loepa badjoe dan angkin / Satoe orang tiada soedi tengokin / Mah Boejoeng gila sehari-hari / Loepa maloe dia poenya diri / Sampe dia makan nadjisnja sendiri / Mati didalam pendjara sebab satori. (I have used the text by O.S. Tjiang. Hellwig confirms that these stanzas are identical with the text by Lie Kim Hok. The English translation is mine.)

¹¹ All English translations for the case study of Men Negara are by George Quinn, from A.A. Panji Tisna, *The Rape of Sukreni*, 1998

Men Negara's out-of-the-way establishment. There they are cajoled into buying refreshments at inflated prices for the privilege of spending a few minutes in conversation with Ni Negari. The local police chief I Gusti Made Tusan, pursues Negari, ingratiating himself with her mother by spending considerable sums on the renovations to the coffee shop, which is transformed from its former dirty, shabby state.

Evidence:

Ni Negari, who was wearing bright pink, gave all her admirers an effusive welcome. She seemed somehow to have managed to fix a permanent and alluring smile on her face. Men Negara watched her daughter's performance with silent approval. There were thousands of rupiah in the wooden cash box under her bed. The box was almost full! Her neighbour, Pan Rusdiana [sic], had mortgaged his plantation to her, and now she probably had enough money to put the squeeze on him and buy the property outright. (The Rape of Sukreni: 59 / Sukreni Gadis Bali: 49) ¹²

It is at this point that the dazzling Ni Luh Sukreni from Manggis makes her appearance. Not only does she divert Tusan's attention from Negari (thus presenting a threat to Men Negara's source of income) but she is also apparently a rival for the affections of Ida Gde Swamba, a young aristocrat who owns a nearby coconut plantation. What follows is a brutal and heartless conspiracy, which releases Negari from the marriage negotiations with Tusan, while making a profit for Men Negara as a procuress.

Evidence:

Demons exist for one purpose only, to bring horror into people's lives and send them to hell. That is why Men Negara smiled as she stood and left the room. Tonight she would see Sukreni befouled and dishonored. Yes, Sukreni, the paragon, the girl who had dimmed her own daughter's beauty. (The Rape of Sukreni: 71 / Sukreni Gadis Bali: 60) ¹³

¹² Amat manis laku Ni Negari menerima mereka itu; ia berpakaian berwarna kemerah-merahan. Senyumnya seolah-olah dibuat-buat supaya lebih menarik hati orang. Amat senang hati Men Negara melihat tingkah anaknya semacam itu. Peti uangnya dibawah sendi balai-balai tempat tidurnya hampir penuh berisi ribuan rupiah. Cukuplah barangkali untuk pembelian kebun Pak Rudiasna, orang setangganya, yang telah menggadai kepadanya.

¹³ Oleh karena tingkah setan cuma semacam saja, yaitu hendak berbuat bencana supaya manusia masuk neraka. Men Negara pun tersenyum, lalu berdiri dan pergi ke dalam. Gadis yang mengalahkan kecantikan anaknya itu, akan dihinakannya pada malam itu.

Sukreni is persuaded to stay the night at Men Negara's house, where Tusan rapes her, and the following morning she flees to Singaraja. 'Unable to return to her village bearing shame and contamination, she searched for a way to disappear... This was the only path left to her, for she could never again set eyes on the faces of her father and friends.' (The Rape of Sukreni: 77 / Sukreni Gadis Bali 67)¹⁴

The final three chapters of the novel unravel the workings of fate. Men Negara's shop and rice barn is burnt to the ground and she goes mad: presumably a fitting punishment for what she has inflicted on Sukreni, who turns out to be her own daughter by an earlier marriage.

Evidence:

Was the woman mad? Yes, she was mad and the woman was Men Negara. She had been like this for a year now. She was scrawny, her hair tangled, her eyes wild and wandering. Her clothes were torn and filthy. She slept on the ground with only the dew as a cover for her at night. In her mind she was living as she had lived before her world fell apart. She was still running her household, managing her shop, keeping watch over her well-stocked rice store. (The Rape of Sukreni: 109 / Sukreni Gadis Bali: 99)¹⁵

SYMPTOMS: Avarice / envy / procuring / Accomplice in violent and premeditated rape

DIAGNOSIS: MADNESS

CASE STUDY 3

NAME: MARICE

PROFESSION: Wife and Mother

¹⁴ Ia tidak akan pulang membawa malu dan cemar ke kampungnya. Biar ia hilang, ia mengembara mencari nafkah di negeri orang, sebab tak terlihat lagi olehnya rupa bapak dan sahabat kenalannya.

¹⁵ Kasihan, gilakah orang itu? Benar, orang itu ialah Men Negara yang sudah jadi gila. Setahun sudah ia dalam keadaan demikian. Badannya sudah kurus kering, rambutnya terurai kusut, dan matanya tak tentu arah pandangannya. Kain bajunya robek-robek serta kotor, karena ia selalu tidur di tanah dengan berselimutkan embun. Ia ada di situ; sangkanya, ia masih dalam keadaan seperti dahulu, sebelum terjadi malang celaka itu. Pikirnya, ia sedang menyelenggarakan rumahnya, kedainya serta limbungnya yang penuh dengan padi...

TEXT: *Burung-Burung Manyar* (The Weaverbirds) Novel, 1981¹⁶

AUTHOR: Y.B. Mangunwijaya

Case History:

Marice is a fair-skinned woman of mixed Dutch-Indonesian descent, married to a Javanese captain in the Dutch colonial army during the Dutch colonial rule of the Indies. She is the mother of Setadewa (Teto), the protagonist of the novel, who also fights for the Dutch army. In 1944, during the Japanese occupation of the Indies, her husband is captured as an anti-Japanese spy.

Evidence:

Mama, having lost the husband she loved so dearly, had retreated more and more from life. She had grown thin and easily susceptible to illness. She became more silent and uncommunicative. She began to seek solace in mysticism and the spiritual world. (WB: 45 / BBM: 32) ¹⁷

Subsequently, Marice disappears. It turns out that she has been given an ultimatum: either her husband would die, or Marice could become the mistress of the Commandant of the Japanese Military Police. She chose the latter course. This results in Teto's ambivalent (even unforgiving) attitude towards his mother. He develops a hatred for the Japanese as well as the nationalists who ostensibly supported the Japanese occupiers, 'the bastards who had made a whore out of my mother.'

Evidence:

I didn't know whether to be proud of my mother and to sing her praises or to kill her. From that time onward Mr and Mrs Antana became my second parents. After that I never tried to visit my unfortunate mother again. (WB: 47 – 48 / BBM: 34) ¹⁸

¹⁶ Original Indonesian text from the novel will be abbreviated as BBM, English translations as WB. English translations in the case studies of Marice and Larasati are by Thomas M. Hunter, from *The Weaverbirds* 1991.

¹⁷ Setelah ditinggal suami yang dicintainya, Mami semakin mundur, kurus dan mudah sakit. Dan semakin diam semakin diam. Mami lalu mencari hiburannya dalam mistik dan alam gaib.

¹⁸ Apakah aku harus bangga dan memuji Mami atautkah aku harus membunuhnya? Sejak itu Bapak dan Ibu Antana menjadi Papiku dan Mamiku. Selanjutnya tak pernah lagi aku melihat kembali Mamiku yang malang itu.

Teto joins the Colonial army under the mentorship of the Dutch Major Verbruggen, (a former suitor of his mother) who becomes a surrogate father to him. On their first meeting he learns of the depths of Verbruggen's feelings for Marice. He also hands over a letter to the major, from Marice.

Evidence:

"It's a good thing that I'm not your father," he said, assessing me with a cold grin. The letter remained unopened as he fixed his piercing gaze on my eyes. I knew then that he was still suffering the pain of my mother's rejection... My poor mama, Marice, a shining example of both self-sacrifice and of ill-repute for having been forced to become the pet of her beloved husband's enemies. Why couldn't life be simpler? Why did everything that was good and beautiful stand side by side with what was foul and depraved? ... Did Major Verbruggen know that his former sweetheart had become a whore for the Japanese? No, he mustn't learn of it. What had Mama written in the letter? No doubt, she had asked for shelter for her little Teto. What else would she have written? (WB: 65 / BBM: 50 - 51) ¹⁹

The reader remains ignorant of the contents of the letter: Marice is not permitted to convey her feelings or the possible trust that she has invested in Verbruggen by sending this letter with her son. The meeting is dominated by the melodramatic reactions of the two men. It is not even clear from the text that either of them read the letter in the end.

Evidence:

"Now this is an order, Leo. Read me your mother's letter. If you don't I'll have someone break every bone in your body. So saying, he flung the paper in front of me... "Read it!" he shouted so thunderously I almost jumped. "Yes, sir!" I said, beginning to feel that he had gotten the best of me after all. I opened Mama's letter, my heart in a tumult. I couldn't speak. I felt unable to say or do anything. The letter fell from my hands to the floor. "So what's it say?" He looked over his shoulder at me again. Seeing me standing unable to restrain my emotions he came over to me and patted me on the shoulders.

¹⁹ "Untung saya tidak jadi ayahmu." Komentarnya dingin sambil menyeringai. Kertas itu belum lagi dibukanya. Matanya menembus matamu. Dan segera aku tahu, bahwa ia masih menderita karena ibuku menolak dia... Marice yang malang. Yang ternoda dan ikhlas menjadi binatang piaraan musuh-musuh dari suami yang ia cintai. Mengapa hidup tidak bisa sederhana? Mengapa selalu segala yang indah berdampingan dengan yang kotor dan berbau?... Apa Mayor Verbruggen sudah tahu bekas kekasihnya menjadi lonte Jepang? Jangan. Tidak boleh ia tahu. Apa yang ditulis Mami dalam surat itu? Tentulah minta perlindungan untuk Teto alias Leo anaknya. Apa lagi yang akan ditulisnya?

Taking a match from his pocket he set fire to the letter and watched as it slowly burned before our eyes. (WB: 68 / BBM: 52 - 53) ²⁰

In the last days of the Dutch attempts to reclaim the Indies, Teto discovers his mother: Verbruggen has located her in the Kramat mental asylum in Magelang.

Evidence:

What lingers on in my consciousness now is a single impression: a thin and pale but still beautiful woman. And it is that countenance with its beautiful smile I consider the final inheritance that my mother granted me.

Whatever questions I asked, all Mama could do was smile and say, "I gave them everything. But they broke their promise.

"Do you know who I am?" I asked her.²¹

"I gave them everything. Everything..."

"It's me. It's Teto, Mama."

"Yes, Teto, but they broke their promise."...

She stared into space, at some distant place, as if she were already "over there", and not "here" in the present any longer. But for all that, her appearance was very calm, and her movements were the same as they had been in the past. (WB: 166 / BBM:

133) ²²

Many years later, Teto, who is by this time in America, receives news from the director of the mental asylum in Kramat, confirming that his mother has died and that it is Verbruggen who has been covering the costs of her stay by generous contributions to the institution. Teto realizes that her last words had been a message to him. Later, he is able to return to Indonesia to face the past as 'the result of my

²⁰ "Hei Leo ini komando. Baca surat ibumu ini. Ayo. Kalau tidak, tulang rusukmu patah semua nanti." Dan kertas itu dilemparkan padaku... "Baca!" teriaknya seperti halilintar yang membuatku kaget. "Ya, Mayoor," akhirnya aku sedikit merasa kalah. Kubuka surat Mamiku. Tetapi aku pun tidak bisa menahan kekalutan jiwa dan aku hanya terdiam saja tidak bisa apa-apa. Surat itu terjatuh di lantai. "Bagaimana?" Ia menoleh dan ketika melihatku penuh emosi, ia menghampiriku, bahunya ditepuk-tepuk penuh pengertian. Ia mengambil korek api dari sakunya dan pelan surat Mamiku dibakar.

²¹ Note the emphasis on Marices' recognition of Teto as an indication of sanity.

²² [Y]ang masih tinggal dalam kesadaranku hanyalah satu ini. Seorang wanita kurus dan pucat, tetapi masih cantik. Dan wajah kurus putih yang cantik tersenyum itulah yang kuanggap anugerah warisan terakhir yang kuterima langsung dari Mami. Ibu sudah tidak dapat diajak berdialog. Pada setia pertanyaan beliau hanya tersenyum dan berkata lembut: "Ya, segala telah kuberikan. Segala telah kuberikan. Tetapi mereka mengingkari janji." "Mami, Mami tahu aku siapa?" "Ya, segala telah kuberikan, segala." "Mami, aku Teto, anakmu Teto. Mami, aku Teto." "Ya Teto, mereka mengingkari janji."... Pandangan mata ibu nampak jauh. Seolah-olah dia sudah di "sana", tidak di "sini" lagi. Tetapi ibu sangat tenang wajahnya dan segala gerak-geriknya sama seperti dulu.

mother's self-sacrifice, the fruit of her suffering and prayers.' (WB: 221 / BBM: 185)

23

Throughout the novel, Marice speaks only a few words. Her son relates her story. There is no doubt that she is the love object of her husband, son and Major Verbruggen. Yet the subjective depths of her own passions and longings are never explored. Even the important letter that Teto delivers to Verbruggen remains a mystery forever; a trope for Marice's presence, much as the *keris* represents an absent bridegroom. Her words, consumed by fire, are never conveyed to the reader: rather, the letter becomes a device to demonstrate the emotions of Verbruggen and Teto. She is a victim of history, a comfort woman in the Japanese occupation, forced to give up her honour to save her husband, and later placed as a hopeless case in a mental asylum. Betrayed, she finally speaks: an aphasic monologue that reiterates her betrayal. Her friend, Mrs Antana, regards her as a heroine; her son Teto remains conflicted, although Marice's entry to prostitution has been forced and has cost her sanity.

SYMPTOMS: Depression, illness, self-sacrifice, comfort woman for Japanese army, sense of betrayal, loss of self-respect, guilt

DIAGNOSIS: INSTITUTIONALIZATION / SILENCE (APHASIA) / MADNESS / DEATH

CASE STUDY 4

NAME: LARASATI (ATIK)

PROFESSION: Activist and Academic, Wife and Mother

TEXT: *Burung-Burung Manyar* (The Weaverbirds) Novel, 1981

AUTHOR: Y.B. Mangunwijaya

Case History:

Larasati (Atik) is the female counterpart to Teto, the male protagonist of *Burung-Burung Manyar*. As a young girl, with connections to the court in Surakarta (Solo),

²³ Ini berkat pengorbanan Mami. Buah hasil penderitaan dan doa ibunya.

she is high spirited and rebellious. It is significant that she echoes some of the thoughts of Indonesia's first feminist writer, Kartini (having been given a copy of Kartini's *From Darkness to Light* on her tenth birthday).

Foreshadowing the future for Atik are, on the one hand, traditional Javanese expectations of marriage. On the other hand, through the influence of her father, she is developing a love of nature and an interest in nationalist politics during the Japanese occupation of the Indies.

Evidence:

1. It seemed sad that a girl must marry and be separated from her mother and father. Atik knew that this was ever so. Though she was still at a tender age, she was already well aware of the fate that awaits all women. She wondered how her mother had won her father. (WB: 34 / BBM 24) ²⁴
2. Atik had become a young woman who burned with the zeal of a just cause. The flame that had been set by Soekarno's freedom movement burned brightly within her. (WB: 52 / BBM: 37) ²⁵

Eventually Atik and Teto, linked since childhood, become political adversaries. Teto, fuelled by his hatred of the Japanese, joins the Dutch Colonial Army, and Atik works for the Prime Minister of the embryo Indonesian republic in the years after the Japanese defeat. From this time any close contact between them becomes problematic.

Evidence:

Atik's letter made it painfully clear that we now lived in two different worlds. Okay, it's over, I said to myself. That's how it must be. Atik had become a secretary for the rebels. Okay, fine! From this moment we would begin to find out who's right, with bitter reality as our testing ground! There was no longer room for empty words. (WB: 74 / BBM: 58) ²⁶

²⁴ Ah, setiap gadis pada suatu saat harus kawin dan berpisah dari Ayah-Ibu. Atik juga tahu itu. Memang ia masih gadis kecil, tetapi ia sadar, akan selalu begitu nasib setiap gadis. Bagaimana dulu ibu sampai mendapat ayah?

²⁵ Atik memang sudah menjadi pemuda yang bergelora. Api pijar Bung Karno sudah menyala di dalamnya.

²⁶ Memang kita dari dunia yang berlainan, Atik. Ya, sudah! Beginilah... ya beginilah... jadi Atik bekerja sebagai sekretaris pada pemerintah pemberontak itu? Okay! Baiklah! Mulai sekarang kita akan membuktikan, siapa yang benar. Dengan realita kejam! Tidak dengan omongan belaka.

Teto has little respect for Atik's position, a job that she herself describes as 'a job of limited importance, I know.' (WB: 73/4) But it makes him spare the life of Syahrir, and to rethink his own political affiliations:

'Because, behind that little man, I had glimpsed a young woman typing something or other, a green and inexperienced secretary who had the good fortune to be able to feel joy and admiration when looking at her boss, the youngest prime minister from the youngest country in the world. And me? I had become a leader in an army of hoodlums already in its death throes.' (WB: 82 / BBM: 63 – 64) ²⁷

Losing his mother to the Japanese and Atik to the Republicans has left Teto at his most vulnerable. When he encounters Atik at the abandoned Antana house in Jakarta, his conventional ideas about masculinity and femininity (for example his view of women as fragile and emotional) are exposed. Atik, evidently, is a passive receptacle for Teto's frustration and also a confused projection of his mother. It is a perceptive vision of male desire.

Evidence:

I, a Colonial Army soldier, the very picture of manliness when leading my men, could not bear the thought of losing both my mother and Atik. Such fragile creatures, the both of them, but in their frailty lay their greatest power... In that short time with Atik I really only wanted to save whatever I might be able to save, but instead I found myself crying, something I know most women find distasteful in a man. Women don't like to see a man cry. Tears are a woman's prerogative. When a man is overcome by sorrow he may curse, maintain a noble silence, or even blow the world away with atom bombs. But he must not cry. For a man that is the gravest of faults and that is what I had just done... I later saw that my desire to have Atik "for my own" in fact meant nothing other than to rape her, to force into her through sexual domination, my world and my vision of the world, without regard to whether that was her wish or not... Clearly Atik was not a younger sister. She was my mother's replacement, and it was on this surrogate mother's lap that I had shed my tears. (WB: 96 / BBM: 76) ²⁸

²⁷ ...sebab di belakang orang kecil tadi aku melihat seorang gadis, yang sedang mengetik entah apa, seorang juru ketik muda yang barangkali masih hijau tunas, tetapi yang penuh takjub selalu memandang kepada pemimpinnya, perdana menteri paling muda di dunia dari negara yang paling muda di dunia pula. Dan aku? Aku jadi kepala bandit tentara yang sudah sekarat. ²⁸ Aku, lelaki Knil yang sekasar dan sehebat itu di muka kompiku, aku tidak tahan merasakan penderitaan ditinggal oleh seorang ibu dan seorang adik perempuan. Keduanya kaum yang rapuh, tetapi entah begitu kuasa justru mereka itu karena kerapuhan mereka... Ketika itu aku ingin mempertahankan yang masih dapat kupertahankan. Dan aku hanya bisa berbuat sesuatu yang aku tahu, menjijikan perempuan, menangis. Wanita tidak suka melihat lelaki menangis. Menangis adalah hak kaum wanita. Lelaki harus memaki-maki, mengumpat-umpat bila ia sedih. Atau diam ningrat. Atau meledakkan dunia ini dengan bom atom. Tetapi

When Teto meets with Atik and her family after many years, she is married with three children. But the mutual attraction and love is still there. At the height of her personal and academic success, Atik and her husband are killed in a plane crash on their way to Mecca, leaving the survivor, Teto, responsible for the rebuilding of the Indonesian nation.

Atik and Teto represent alternative versions of Indonesia's future as a nation: the syncretic (Atik), a blending of traditional and modern (but always indigenous) influences. Teto's role is a hybrid one, resulting in the creation of a new persona, symbolized by his mixed racial origins (Indo) as well as his assimilation of influences from outside Indonesia. Mangunwijaya permits only one vision of the nation to materialize: that of Teto; and because of this, he uses the contrivance of a plane crash to remove Atik from participating in the national project.

Atik has been both immortalized and immobilized in memory by her honourable death, and the possibility of a feminine agenda for the nation, based on respect for nature and the integrity of indigenous culture, has been displaced by a modernizing and hybrid vision appropriate to Teto's Eurasian heritage. It is also a convenient moral resolution to the erotic triangle of Teto, Atik, and her husband Jono; the alternative to which might have been polyandry; forgivable for a goddess perhaps, but not for the feminised image of a nation.

Evidence:

For even in death (Atik) had proved successful. She had won from death the good fortune of falling on a pilgrimage to the place of God. A gesture of beauty it was to have been, of her own free will and for the sake of love, at her husband's side ... The life of a man whose wife and whose dream have left him behind can be a lonely and bitter one. But by the grace of the All-Merciful, fresh life was breathed into the midday hours of my life... I was made the legal guardian of Atik's three children. I was entrusted to watch over and care for these most precious gifts from Atik and her husband. To guide them towards a future befitting their own "inner nature" and "self-image"... In the past I had been an army brat, a gutter rat who preferred to

tidak menangis. Dan justru itulah yang kulakukan. Sungguh kesalahan besar... Kelak aku baru tahu, bahwa memiliki saat itu hanya berarti ingin memperkosa Atik agar dimasuki oleh duniaku, oleh gambaran hidupku. Tanpa bertanya apa dia mau atau tidak... Atik jelas bukan adik. Ia praktis pengganti Mamiku. Dan di dalam pangkuan pengganti Mamiku itu aku menangis, tolol dan menjijikan.

inhabit darkened spaces. But now I had emerged to stand beneath the open sky. (WB: 308 – 309 / BBM: 260 - 261) ²⁹

SYMPTOMS: Political activism (in opposition to her sweetheart, Teto). Attachment to nature. University education, dedicated service to the new Indonesian nation. Marriage of affection, not passion. Danger of a *ménage a trois*.

DIAGNOSIS: DEATH (Plane crash en route to Mecca)

CASE STUDY 5

NAME: SRINTIL

PROFESSION: Ronggeng: Dancer / Singer / Prostitute

TEXT: *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* (The Dancer of Dukuh Paruk) Trilogy of novels: 1982 – 1986.

AUTHOR: Ahmad Tohari

Case History:

Srintil was born in 1946, in the isolated hamlet of Dukuh Paruk, a small community in the grip of misfortune and poverty. In the novel's opening chapter, she is believed by the village elders to be possessed by the spirit of *ronggeng*, an erotic / sacral dancer closely linked with the prosperity of the village. The role of *ronggeng* is divinely ordained; Srintil is 'handed over' to the *ronggeng* trainer to undergo a series of rituals for this specifically feminine role, which is also a form of ritualised prostitution.

²⁹ Tetapi terlonjak juga sebentar rasa iri pada Atik, si dia yang sebenarnya dapat dikatakan selalu berhasil; sampai kematiannya pun sebetulnya bernasib untung: gugur dalam perjalanan ziarah ke Tuhan; dalam ulah sikap indah, sukarela mendampingi suami demi kecintaannya ... Ya, memang hati duda sangat sering merasa sepi sunyi sendirian. Tetapi untunglah Tuhan Yang Mahapemurah masih sudi memberi kesejukan bagi siang dan petang kurun hidupku; atas persetujuan keluarga dan atas permintaan ayah Jana... ketiga anak Atik kuangkat jadi anakku. Hadiah yang terindah dari Atik dan suaminya ingin kujaga dan kuantar ke hari-depan mereka yang sesuai dengan jati-diri dan bahasa citra sebening mungkin... Aku dulu anak kolong. Sekarang aku masih juga, tetapi anak Kolong Langit.

Srintil's life is a process of rewriting her identity and attempting to reclaim her independence. Apart from her close control by the *ronggeng* trainer and his wife, there are other factors that create ambivalence towards expectations of her role of *ronggeng*, as well as leading to the outcomes of silence / being silenced and madness.

The first is her attachment to Rasus, her childhood sweetheart. They pledge themselves to each other in a number of important ways: Rasus by giving Srintil a small heirloom *keris*, (a Javanese bridegroom sometimes sends the *keris* to represent him in a proxy marriage) and Srintil by surrendering her virginity to Rasus, an act of assertion just before she fulfils the final ritual of *bukak-klambu* (where the *ronggeng*'s virginity is sold to the highest bidder: actually a ritualised rape).

Thus they have made a symbolic commitment, contradicting the *ronggeng*'s social role of being the possession of all men, rather than the possession of one. This creates major conflicts for Srintil between her 'official' role as village *ronggeng* and her social/ biological cravings to be a wife and mother. Rasus is bitter about the loss of his childhood sweetheart; yet he continually reappears in her life. He resists Srintil's pleas to marry and have children, ostensibly because of altruistic feelings for his village. However, he has intermittent sexual encounters with her, subsequently abandoning her when he returns to the army.

Evidence:

Yet, as a child of Paruk who had come to know a great deal about the world outside, I had a thousand arguments to counterbalance, even to reject, Srintil's entreaties.

Srintil could have whatever else she wanted of me, except a baby and marriage... (*The Dancer*: 110 / RDP: 105 - 106) ³⁰

Srintil is stigmatised as a *tapol* (ex-political prisoner) because of her imprisonment as an unwitting communist collaborator in 1965. She is deprived by the author of the opportunity to speak (or write) about her experiences in prison. He excises Srintil's voice, citing her illiteracy, and voicing on her behalf a desire to remain silent (an apology for her muteness) as well as the reluctance of others to discuss her situation, a reflection of a national silence about the PKI that lasted for more than thirty years:

Evidence:

³⁰ Tetapi sebagai anak Dukuh Paruk yang telah tahu banyak akan dunia luar, aku mempunyai seribu alasan untuk dipertimbangkan, bahkan untuk menolak permintaan Srintil. Srintil boleh mendapatkan apa-apa dariku selain bayi dan perkawinan.

It was not possible though, for even the most skilled biographer to write about this period of Srintil's life. In the first place, no one had been willing to talk about her whereabouts or circumstances during those two years. Secondly, in absolute and utter desperation, Srintil had resolved to say nothing to anyone about what she had endured. And it was unlikely that she would ever publish her memoirs as she could neither read nor write... (The Dancer: 310 / Jantera Bianglala: 37) ³¹

Srintil's final effort to redeem herself and establish a respectable self-image as a wife also fails. She forms an attachment to Bajus, a government official, whose intentions appear 'honourable'. However, his agenda is to offer Srintil's sexual services to others to gain advancement in his profession; when she refuses he threatens her with her 'communist past'.

Abandoned by Rasus and betrayed by Bajus, Srintil has nowhere to go but madness. This is how Rasus finds her when he returns to Dukuh Paruk with high-minded ideals of saving his village, through reason and Islam, from its primitive and benighted condition. He describes Srintil as 'reduced to the level of a beast' (The Dancer: 441 / Jantera Bianglala: 218), while recognizing that it is she who has been martyred for the village's misfortunes.

He also insists that she 'recognize' him, and begs God to 'restore her to humanity'. The following day he takes her to an army hospital with a ward for the insane. His own pseudo-sacrificial act is that of deciding to marry Srintil to restore cosmic balance to his village, 'even though she was in a mental state which was devoid of humanity.' (The Dancer: 450 / Jantera Bianglala: 230)

Evidence:

What my eyes beheld was too difficult to absorb; I was devoid of understanding, realization. I saw Srintil, completely disheveled, wearing drawstring shorts and a tattered chemise. She was sitting in something, perhaps her own excrement. She glanced at me momentarily, then began to talk to herself. The small lantern in the room illuminated the scene of a human wreckage, a person who had once been the

³¹ Kemudian, mungkinkah kiranya seorang penyusun riwayat hidup yang paling unggul sekalipun mampu menyelesaikan pekerjaannya bila yang harus dia susun adalah biografi Srintil? Karena pertama, tak seorang pun bersedia memberi keterangan di mana dan bagaimana Srintil selama masa dua tahun lebih itu. Kedua, Srintil sudah mengunci dirinya pada satu tekad bulat bahwa dia tidak akan berkata apa pun dan kepada siapa pun tentang pengalamannya. Ketiga, sebenarnya orang bisa berharap pada suatu ketika kelak Srintil menerbitkan sebuah *memoar*. Namun harapan ini pasti sia-sia karena Srintil sama sekali buta huruf.

sweetheart of the village... I couldn't see that there was anything left of Srintil's humanity; she had been reduced to the level of a beast. This seemed to me to be a thousand times worse than death because, at the very least, the deaths I had witnessed had been of human beings. (The Dancer: 441/ Jantera Bianglala: 218 - 219)

32

Rasus visualizes Srintil as an extension of his own ego, a tabula rasa on to which he transfers his confused projections of his lost mother. Twice he likens her to a 'mirror', first after he has presented her with the heirloom keris thus symbolically declaring his attachment:

Evidence:

Although she wasn't aware of it, Srintil had played a part in forming my fantasies about the woman who had given birth to me... She wouldn't understand that, for me, she was a mirror through which I was desperately trying to see the image of my mother. (The Dancer: 44, 49 / RDP: 45, 50) 33

The second occasion is after he returns to Paruk and finds Srintil mad. She has lost her 'reason', and therefore he has lost the idealized image of 'the sweetheart of the village'. Her image is inextricable from his own, 'a glass for the 'subject' to gaze upon himself and re-produce himself in his reflection...' (Irigaray 1991: 66)

"Srin," I said, approaching her slowly. I gently placed my hand on her shoulder.

"Look here. You know who I am, don't you?"

Srintil looked at me. I used to see a reflection of myself in her eyes, but could detect none of this now, not even the smallest evidence. It was difficult to believe that the person in front of me actually was her.

"You know who I am, don't you?" I repeated.

32 Apa yang tertangkap oleh mata amat sulit kucerna menjadi pengertian dan kesadaran. Srintil yang demikian kusut dengan celana kolor sampai ke lutut serta kaus oblong yang robek-robek. Srintil yang duduk di atas sesuatu, mungkin kotorannya sendiri. Srintil yang hanya menoleh sesaat kepadaku lalu kembali berbicara sendiri. Dan pelita kecil dalam kamar itu melengkapi citra punahnya kemanusiaan pada diri bekas mahkota Dukuh Paruk itu... Srintil tidak bisa dikatakan mengalami apa pun kecuali penjungkirbalikan derajat manusia menjadi derajat binatang. Ini cukup untuk kukatakan bahwa yang terjadi atas dirinya seribu laki lebih hebat daripada kematian karena kematian itu sendiri adalah anak kandung kehidupan kemanusiaan.

33 Tetapi jelas, penampilan Srintil membantuku mewujudkan angan-anganku tentang pribadi perempuan yang telah melahirkanku... Dia takkan mengerti bahwa bagiku, dirinya adalah sebuah cermin di mana aku dapat mencoba mencari bayangan Emak.

"Rasus, Crazy Rasus, and you want to take me back to prison?" (The Dancer: 444 / Jantera Bianglala: 221 - 222) ³⁴

When Rasus takes her to the army hospital, Srintil struggles, accusing him of returning her to prison. It is true that mental asylums are merely a type of prison, and their keepers are moral guardians of the mentally disordered. Even in her 'madness', Srintil can recognize what is happening to her. And, as a further irony, the building where she had been detained as a political prisoner for two years is visible from the bus stop...

Evidence:

We entered the building [the army hospital] and went directly to the ward for the mentally insane. Oh, God! Because she struggled, Srintil was immediately put in a room with an iron door. When a staff member locked the huge bolt on the door, my tears flowed freely. The ward chief of staff asked me for her details and personal data. I told him everything, adding that I would be responsible for paying the costs of her treatment. But when he asked me about my relationship to her, I fell silent, unsure of what to say....

"What a pity. Truly a pity. The moment I saw her, *I thought how beautiful she would be if she were healthy and whole...*"³⁵ (The Dancer: 449 / Jantera Bianglala: 228 - 229) ³⁶

As René Lysloff concludes, Srintil never has a choice about how she lives her life. Although she resists control and makes a determined effort to change her situation, she has no agency. 'As a man, Rasus could leave his past behind. He could choose to embrace Islam. As a woman, Srintil has to live with the shame of her past.' (Lysloff, Afterword, *The Dancer*: 459)

³⁴ "Srin," kataku sambil maju perlahan. Hati-hati kuletakkan tanganku di pundaknya. "Lihatlah kemari. Kamu mengerti siapa aku, bukan?" Srintil menoleh. Cermin diri yang selama ini kukenal tidak muncul sedikit pun pada kedua matanya sehingga tidak mudah percaya bahwa yang sedang kuhadapi benar-benar Srintil. "Kamu kenal siapa aku, bukan?" ulangku. "Rasus. Rasus gila yang akan mengembalikan aku ke rumah tahanan. Ya, kan?"

³⁵ My italics. A reference to Srintil having lost her femininity.

³⁶ Srintil kami papah masuk, langsung ke bangsal perawatan penyakit jiwa. Ya, Tuhan! Karena Srintil terus meronta maka sebuah kamar berpintu besi dibuka untuknya. Ketika petugas menguncinya dengan sebuah gembok besar air mataku meleleh. Kepala bangsal memanggilku untuk minta keterangan dan data tentang Srintil. Kukatakan semuanya, terutama bahwa akulah yang menanggung segala biaya perawatan. Tetapi lidahku tiba-tiba kelu ketika petugas bertanya tentang hubunganku dengan Srintil... "Wah, sayang. Sungguh sayang. Sepintas kulihat dia memang, wah. Bisa kubayangkan kecantikannya di kala dia sehat."

SYMPTOMS: Overt sexuality, obsessive attachment to her childhood sweetheart, maternal urges, desire for a conventional marriage, resistance, performing at Communist rallies in the 1960s.

DIAGNOSIS: IMPRISONMENT, SILENCE, MADNESS.
INSTITUTIONALISED IN MENTAL ASYLUM.

CASE STUDY 6

NAME: ANNELIES

PROFESSION: Daughter of Nyai Ontosoroh and Wife of Minke

TEXT: *Bumi Manusia* (This Earth of Mankind) Novel, 1980

AUTHOR: Pramoedya Ananta Toer

Case History:

Annelies is the daughter of the Dutch manager of a sugar estate (and later owner of a dairy farm) in Java: Herman Mellema, and his Javanese *nyai* Sanikem / Nyai Ontosoroh. As such Annelies is brought up with European status in the Indies, with more privileges in law than her mother (as has her brother Robert). Nyai Ontosoroh trains Annelies in farm management, passing on the knowledge she has gained from Tuan Mellema.

Annelies is also blessed (or cursed) with an extraordinary and fragile beauty. It is this beauty that attracts the protagonist of the novel, Minke, when he first meets her at their house. Their friendship grows on successive visits, and Annelies forms an attachment to Minke; when he fails to visit for a period of time Annelies becomes sick and confined to bed. Nyai Ontosoroh sends for Minke; both she and the doctor tell him that Annelies' only hope of recovery from her melancholia is for Minke to make a commitment.

Minke moves to Nyai Ontosoroh's house and he and Annelies commence a sexual relationship. It is at this phase of the relationship that he becomes aware that she is

not a virgin and the secret comes out-- she has been brutally raped by her brother Robert. This has left her vulnerable and is the source of her psychological frailty, according to her doctor. She becomes emotionally dependent on Minke, who falls in love with her and marries her.

Evidence: ("The Doctor's Story") ³⁷

"Annelies, your sweetheart, carries some burden that weighs heavily on that fragile heart of hers... She has been able to capture your heart, if I'm not mistaken. She should have the right to feel happy. But no, Mr Minke. On the contrary, she is suffering very, very greatly; afraid of losing you, whom she loves with all her heart. Nah, this piling up of all sorts of sufferings on her. She could go mad, Mr Minke, I'm not joking, a person could go insane, become totally unbalanced, lose their mind, go crazy ... As soon as she sees signs that you are going to leave her, she'll begin to become anxious. So you must not let her see any such signs, let alone actually leave her. To leave her would mean to break her."³⁸ (Awakenings, 191 – 192, 193 / Bumi Manusia: 245 – 246, 247)

Eventually, after the death of Tuan Mellema in a Chinese-owned brothel, it is revealed that Mellema is not legally divorced from his wife in Holland.³⁹ His son by this marriage arrives in Java and appropriates the dairy farm that has been established by the joint efforts of Nyai and Tuan Mellema. Nyai (as her mother) and Minke (as her husband) have no claim in a Dutch court of law to Annelies, who is classified as racially Dutch: in addition, her marriage to Minke is declared invalid because she is considered underage. She is virtually kidnapped by Maurits Mellema and taken to Holland.

Thus both her brother and half brother appropriate Annelies. She has no choice about her first sexual relationship, and her marriage to Minke is also not recognized. She is a tragic and doomed woman who belongs nowhere and owns nothing; in addition she is racially hybrid, the illegitimate daughter of a Javanese concubine.

³⁷ English translations are by Max Lane, from *This Earth of Mankind* (Bumi Manusia) in the volume *Awakenings*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1984

³⁸ Annelies, pacar Tuan itu, masih punya perkara yang membebani hatinya yang rapuh selama ini... Dia telah dapat menawan hati Tuan, kalau aku tidak keliru. Semestinya dia berhak untuk berbahagia. Tetapi tidak, Tuan Minke. Dia justru sangat, sangat menderita: ketakutan kehilangan Tuan, orang yang dicintainya sejujur hati. Nah, kan itu suatu tumpuk penderitaan batin yang majemuk? Orang bisa jadi gila, Tuan, bukan main-main, bisa jadi miring, sinting, tak waras, kentir... Begitu dia melihat tanda-tanda Tuan akan meninggalkannya, dia akan gelisah. Maka Tuan jangan sampai memperlihatkan apalagi melakukannya. Melakukannya berarti dia akan patah.

³⁹ This is later proved to be a lie. Mellema and his wife were divorced in 1879, before either of Nyai's children was born. (Bumi Manusia: 337)

Ironically, Minke's biological mother has praised the Dutch for not engaging in woman stealing (unlike the Javanese). She says to Minke at the time of his wedding to Annelies:

Today things are more secure. It's not like it was when I was little, let alone when your grandfather was little. Even though the Dutch are so very powerful they have never stolen people's wives or daughters like the kings who ruled our ancestors. Ah, Child, had you lived in those days you would have been constantly called to the battlefield to be able to keep possession of your wife, that angel. (Bumi Manusia: 303 / Awakenings: 237) ⁴⁰

To Maurits Mellema, however, Annelies is a chattel, no different to the livestock on the farm. Minke describes her as 'like a fish that was already in the frying pan. How moving was the fate of this fragile doll, my wife. It looked as if she had lost the will to do anything at all' (Awakenings: 255 / Bumi Manusia: 324 – 325)⁴¹ Even before the sea voyage to Europe, Annelies declines into melancholia and becomes almost catatonic. She dies fairly soon after arriving in Europe, thus leaving Maurits the sole claimant to the Indies property. Annelies has become a defenceless pawn in the game of greed and revenge played by Mellema's family in Holland.

SYMPTOMS: Frailty and melancholy, rape and incest victim, tendency to depression, dependent personality. Indo heritage. Kidnapped by her half-brother. Lack of agency.

DIAGNOSIS: SILENCE, INVALIDISM, DEATH.

CASE STUDY 7

NAME: RORO MENDUT

PROFESSION: Girl from Fishing Village, Calon Selir

⁴⁰ Sekarang keadaan sudah begini aman, tidak seperti aku masih kecil dulu, apalagi semasa kecil Nenekndamu... Biar Belanda ini sangat, sangat berkuasa, mereka tidak pernah merampas istri atau putri orang seperti raja-raja nenek-moyang-mu dulu. Ah, Nak, kalau kau hidup di jaman itu kau harus terus-menerus turun ke medan-perang untuk dapat tetap memiliki istrimu, bidadari itu.

⁴¹ ... seperti ikan yang sudah ada dipenggorengan. Betapa menghibakan nasib boneka rapuh, istriku ini. Nampak benar ia telah kehilangan kemauan untuk berbuat sesuatu.

TEXT: *Roro Mendut* (Novel, 1983)

AUTHOR: Y.B. Mangunwijaya

Case History:

Roro Mendut is a high-spirited girl from a fishing village on the north coast of Java. Against her wishes, she is appropriated twice, the first time by 'selection' to be a *selir* (minor consort), in the Javanese kingdom of Pathi, the second time by capture, when Pathi is conquered. Mendut is taken to the kingdom of Mataram, where she is presented to Wiroguno, Mataram's military commander. Thus she becomes a prisoner in his palace, and a 'marginal' figure in the court. She never forgets her desire to escape and never submits to her fate as a *selir*. Nor is she willing to be silenced; she constantly speaks her mind, even to the great Wiroguno and his chief consort, Nyai Ajeng.

She escapes from the stifling palace environment with the young merchant from Cirebon, Pronocitro, who infiltrates Wiroguno's palace by offering his services as a stable hand. But their felicity is short-lived; Wiroguno pursues them to the coast, and kills Pronocitro in a duel, during which Mendut is also stabbed when she attempts to protect her lover. To the end, she resists, hoping that love will triumph over the inevitability of death. United in death, the lovers are carried out to sea by the waves. Mendut has neither submitted to an ageing patriarch towards whom she has no sexual interest, nor to the patriarchal power of the Mataram Kingdom.

In a significant conversation with Pronocitro, Mendut challenges the assumption that it is an honour for a woman to enter palace service, suggesting that men have more agency and choice than women.

Evidence:

Pronocitro whispered in amazement, "To be chosen by the palace, isn't that the dream of every village girl?"

"Chosen...? Prono, I am always envious of men, they can choose for themselves."

"Choose or do as they please?"

Mendut smiled. There was something she wanted to say, but she hesitated.

Finally, she closed her eyes and whispered, "Pronocitro, I am a straightforward person. You're not angry that I chose you?"

The young man smiled, "Did you choose me or did you just do as you pleased?" (RM: 320 – 321) ⁴²

SYMPTOMS: Lack of sophistication, independence, rebellion against authority, outspokenness, primary attachment to other women. Refusal to adapt to palace environment. Choice of own love object.

DIAGNOSIS: KRATON CAPTIVE / FUGITIVE / DEATH

CASE STUDY 8

NAME: (UN-NAMED)

PROFESSION: Mother of Wisanggeni / Saman

TEXT: *Saman* (Novel, 1998)

AUTHOR: Ayu Utami

Case History:

The mother of Wisanggeni (later the Catholic priest Saman) is a Javanese woman of noble birth, 'a figure who could not always be described in rational terms.' ⁴³

Evidence:

She often seemed not to be in places she was or to be in places she wasn't. At such moments it was difficult to engage her in conversation because she didn't listen to people around her. Sometimes her silence would be brought to an end by a visit to a

⁴² Pronocitro berbisik tak habis heran. "Terpilih oleh istana, bukankah itu anugerah impian setiap gadis rakyat?"

"Terpilih...? Mas Prono, saya selalu iri hati pada lelaki. Mereka dapat memilih."

"Memilih atau memaksakan kehendak?"

Mendut tersenyum. Ada yang ingin ia katakan tetapi ragu-ragu. Akhirnya, mata terkutup ia berbisik, "Pronocitro, aku orang terus-terang. Kau tidak marah aku memilihmu?"

Si Jejaka tersenyum, "Memilih atau memaksakan kehendak?"

⁴³ The supernatural incidents described in this case history take place during the childhood of Wisanggeni in the 1960s in South Sumatra. Wisanggeni is the main male protagonist in this novel; the other four are women activists. The case history of Upi that follows is from Saman's residence in the same area in the 1980s.

place that nobody knew, a space that didn't exist anywhere: an emptiness. But when she was present in the place she occupied, she was very warm and affectionate and her husband and other people would forget about the other incomprehensible side of her nature. (Utami 1998: 44 / 2005: 46) ⁴⁴

She and her husband and small son live for 12 years in Perabumulih, a small town in south Sumatra. Their house, and the forest behind it, are metaphors for the 'rational' and the irrational / subconscious worlds, separated by a brush fence at the back of the garden.

One is 'a reasonably spacious wooden framed house', the ordinary home of a regional bank manager; the other is 'a big area of forest that got denser and denser as it receded into the distance', the habitat of hundreds of snakes, wild plants and orchids, the locus of all that is un-named, evil, tangled and terrifying. (Utami 1998: 45 / 2005: 47 - 48)

Mother alternates between these two worlds, the outer 'reality' and tangible world of her family, and the inner 'reality' symbolized by the forest (the world of nature and the unconscious), where she is familiar with every tree and its shadow.

Evidence:

To Wis, there were dozens of coconut trees and palmyras and hundreds of dark shadows. He couldn't tell one from another. But he believed his mother could. Wis believed that if his mother went into the forest (which she may well have done) then she would not get lost. (Utami 1998: 47 / 2005: 49) ⁴⁵

Over the next few years, Mother falls pregnant three times. 'His mother looked more beautiful than ever, but she became increasingly contemplative and retreated more and more often into her daydream, the emptiness.' (Utami 1998: 48 / 2005: 48) ⁴⁶ On the first two occasions the baby mysteriously vanishes from her womb before birth,

⁴⁴ Ia sering nampak tidak berada di tempat ia ada, atau berada di tempat ia tidak ada. Pada saat begitu, sulit mengajaknya bercakap-cakap, sebab ia tak mendengarkan orang yang berbicara di dekatnya. Kadang kebisuannya diakhiri dengan pergi ke tempat yang tidak diketahui orang, barangkali suatu ruang yang tidak dimana-mana: suatu suwung. Tetap jika ia sedang berada di tempat ia ada, maka ia adalah wanita yang amat hangat dan membangkitkan rasa sayang, sehingga suaminya dan orang-orang lupa pada sisi lain dirinya yang sulit dipahami.

⁴⁵ Bagi Wis, ada puluhan kelapa dan lontar, serta ratusan bayangan hitam. Ia tak sanggup membedakannya. Tapi ia percaya ibunya bisa. Wis percaya, seandainya Ibu masuk ke hutan (mungkin sekali perempuan itu memang pernah ke sana), Ibu tidak akan tersesat.

⁴⁶ Ibunya kelihatan makin cantik, tetapi perempuan itu makin sering termenung, makin kerap memasuki suwung.

and although her husband, friends and neighbours search the forest, there is no trace of blood or an aborted foetus.

Evidence:

The family held a funeral mass, and his mother joined in the procession like a repentant sinner. Tears streaming down her face, over and over again she kissed the hand of her husband whose love for her had not waned even though she never told him what had happened. (Utami 1998: 50 – 51 / 2005: 52) ⁴⁷

In conventional psychiatric terms, Mother might be described as ‘mad’, divorced from ‘reality’, irresponsible and delusional, even schizophrenic. But at this point her son, Wis, begins to tune in to his mother’s ‘other dimension’, in which she communicates with a spirit family, an ‘alternative’ husband and children. The third child, a girl, is born ‘naturally’, but dies three days later, in mysterious circumstances. Wis hears footsteps coming from the forest, and his grandmother apparently becomes paralysed when the spiritual abduction occurs, ‘in that void between sleep and consciousness, where the imagination runs wild like a dream but the senses tell you its really happening... Then the baby stopped crying.’ (Utami 1998: 56 / 2005: 57) ⁴⁸

In previous times Mother might have been burnt as a witch. Her husband never punishes her for these incomprehensible happenings, or even considers sending her to an asylum. He is compassionate and accepting:

Evidence:

Wis never heard his father complain. He kept on with his job, never asking his boss for a transfer so that they could remove themselves from the mysterious and upsetting events that had enveloped their lives. He prayed without caring whether or not God would answer his prayers. He never pried into his wife’s behavior. For her he had nothing but love. (Utami 1998: 53 / 2005: 55) ⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Keluarga itu mengadakan misa arwah, dan ibunya mengikuti prosesi seperti pendosa yang menyesal. Sambil airmatanya menitik, ia menciumi tangan suaminya yang tak pernah kehilangan cinta padanya meskipun dia tidak pernah menceritakan apa yang terjadi.

⁴⁸ ...keadaan di ambang tidur dan sadar, di mana imajinasi menjadi liar seperti mimpi tetapi terasa oleh indra seperti nyata... Lalu bayi itu berhenti menangis.

⁴⁹ Wis tak pernah mendengar bapaknya mengeluh. Lelaki itu bekerja tanpa pernah meminta pada atasannya agar dipindahkan dari tempat yang melibatkan mereka pada kejadian tak mengenakkan yang sulit dipahami. Ia berdoa tanpa pernah mempedulikan apakah Tuhan mengabulkan permintaannya atau tidak. Lelaki itu tak pernah mengungkit-ungkit perilaku istrinya. Pada perempuan itu, hanya kasih yang dia miliki.

Doctors and midwives are mystified by the loss of all three children, and people believe that spirits or ghosts had taken the babies. They suggest that a sage be called in to exorcise the ghosts, a suggestion her husband rejects because he doesn't believe in 'superstition'. But neither his faith in God nor the power of prayer makes any difference. After the death of the baby girl, the family grieves, but the spirit family lives on in the other dimension. When the family leaves Perabumulih, the mother 'wept like a widow who has lost her only child', and Wis *intuitively* understands the pain of her separation.

Eventually, the reader learns that Saman's mother has died from uterine cancer, perhaps providing a 'logical' reason for her failure to produce living children, at least in this world. But there remains the ambiguity of the 'other dimension', which is also experienced by other family members, especially Wis. The failure of doctors and midwives to find any logical cause also impels the reader to assign these events to the supernatural. Is there any need to search for an explanation?

Evidence:

The third mass was held once the family had watched over the dead baby for a full day and a full night. This was the first time they had held a requiem mass with a body, which they put in a tiny coffin on the dresser, a little wooden box like an old-fashioned European music box, which they then took to the cemetery in a black car, to be buried deep in the earth.

Requiem. Requiem aeternam.

In paradisum deducant te angeli. (Utami 1998: 57 / 2005: 58) ⁵⁰

SYMPTOMS: Not living in the world of reality, mental absence, retreating into 'emptiness', loss of three children under mysterious circumstances, excessive identification with nature.

DIAGNOSIS: SILENCE, CHRONIC MENTAL DISORDER, DEATH

CASE STUDY 9

⁵⁰ Misa arwah ketiga diadakan setelah keluarga itu puas menatap bayi yang mati, sehari semalam. Itu merupakan misa requiem pertama mereka dengan jenazah, tersimpan dalam peti mungil di atas meja tamu, peti kayu kecil seperti kotak musik Eropa abad lampau, yang kemudian dibawa oleh mobil hitam untuk ditanam dalam-dalam di tanah makam.

Requiem. Requiem aeternam.

In paradisum deducant te angeli.

NAME: UPI

PROFESSION: None (Retarded since birth)

TEXT: *Saman* (Novel, 1998)

AUTHOR: Ayu Utami

Case History:

Upi is a village girl who is about 15 years old when she makes her appearance in the novel *Saman*. The year is about 1984.

Evidence:

Nobody knew her name... She had achieved notoriety in this town for one thing. She was in the habit of wandering around the streets and rubbing her genitals against any suitable object—a post, a fence, the corner of a wall—like an animal in heat. Of course a number of the local boys had taken advantage of this particular habit of hers. Everyone said she enjoyed it too. That's why she keeps coming back to town, they said, in search of an electricity pole or a man. And she would always be certain to find both: a passive pole and an aggressive man. "But everyone says she's mad," Wis whispered in bewilderment. Rogam chortled. He said: even a hole in the wall can give you pleasure, if it's made of flesh, it's even better. (Utami 1998: 68 / 2005: 68)

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She lives in a transmigrant community of rubber-tappers in South Sumatra. According to her family, she has been retarded since birth, and is a danger to herself and others, becoming violent before and during her monthly menstruation. They think she is possessed by the Devil. And at other times her uncontrolled sexual urges are a source of embarrassment to her family.

At first her family use wooden stocks to restrain Upi, then they shut her up in a bamboo cage to prevent her harming animals and other people.

⁵¹ Tidak ada yang tahu namanya... Gadis itu dikenal di kota ini karena satu hal. Dia biasa berkeliaran di jalan-jalan dan menggosok-gosokkan selangkangannya pada benda-benda – tonggak, pagar, sudut tembok, – seperti binatang yang merancap. Tentu saja beberapa laki-laki iseng pernah memanfaatkan tubuhnya. Konon, anak perempuan ini menikmatinya juga. Karena itu, kata orang-orang, dia selalu saja kembali ke kota ini, mencari laki-laki atau tiang listrik. Dan ia selalu mendapatkan keduanya: tiang listrik yang pasif dan lelaki yang agresif. "Tapi, kata orang dia gila!" Wis berbisik dengan terkesiap. Rogam terkekeh. Katanya: lubang tembok pun bisa enak, apalagi yang dari daging.

Evidence:

The cage, a meter and a half by two meters in size, was made of wood and bamboo. It stood there on short stumps like a little stage. It stank of urine and dampness. And there were flies everywhere. The girl squatted behind the bars sobbing, she wasn't howling any more. (Utami 1998: 70 / 2005: 70)⁵²

Saman is appalled by what he sees as inhumane treatment. But her mother says, 'It's not that we don't love her. It's just that we don't know what else to do.' (Utami 1998: 70 / 2005: 70) ⁵³

Evidence:

The girl's name was Upi. The mother began to tell Wis about her lunatic daughter. When she was born, her head was so tiny that her father thought it was some sort of retribution for his having killed a turtle over by the lake in the early stages of his wife's pregnancy. And the child never learnt to speak, though her body developed as normal into that of an adolescent. Maybe because she could never master the language of humans, Satan took hold of her tongue. (Utami 1998: 71 / 2005: 70 - 71)⁵⁴

Out of compassion, Saman builds Upi 'a more pleasant and more sanitary cage' (Utami 1998: 74 / 2005: 73) to ease her suffering. But he rejects her obvious sexual attraction to him, responding to her advances by making her a carved wooden totem to masturbate with. It is a tragic scenario of unrequited love, Upi as non-socialized, rampant female sexuality and Saman as a celibate priest. However, they manage to communicate, 'each in their own language' (Utami 1998: 80 / 2005: 79)⁵⁵ which in Upi's case is 'like a five year old with a speech impediment' (Utami 1998: 64 / 2005: 65)⁵⁶. He is unable to do anything for her, apart from building her a better prison, a more comfortable 'golden cage'. Later, he is unable to rescue her from a final tragedy: when the village is burnt to the ground, Upi dies in her cage.

⁵² Bilik itu terbuat dari kayu dan bambu berukuran satu setengah meter kali dua meter. Berdiri sebagai bangunan panggung dengan kaki pendek. Dari dalam dan bawah tercium pesing serta bau lembab. Dan banyak lalat. Perempuan itu berjongkok di balik ruji-ruji sambil terisak, tak lagi menolong.

⁵³ "Kami bukan tak sayang padanya. Kami ini tak tahu cara lain."

⁵⁴ Nama gadis itu Upi. Kemudian si ibu bercerita tentang anak perempuannya yang gila. Ketika lahir kepalanya begitu kecil sehingga ayahnya menyesal telah membunuh seekor penyu di dekat tasik ketika istrinya hamil muda. Dan anak itu akhirnya tak pernah bisa bicara, meski tubuhnya kemudian tumbuh dewasa. Barangkali karena dia tak menguasai bahasa manusia maka setan mengajaknya bercakap-cakap.

⁵⁵ Mereka bercakap-cakap, seperti biasa, masing-masing dengan bahasanya sendiri.

⁵⁶ Tetapi ia seperti bocah lima tahun yang sulit bicara.

SYMPTOMS: Mental disability, non-lingual, uncontrolled sexuality (nymphomania), destructive violence, menstrual rages. Uses 'the Devil's language'.

DIAGNOSIS: SHUT UP IN A CAGE. SILENCE, MADNESS AND DEATH

CASE STUDY 10

NAME: TINUNG (SITI NURHAYATI)

PROFESSION: Ca-bau-kan (Entertainer and prostitute)

TEXT: Ca-bau-Kan (The Courtesan) Novel, 1999

AUTHOR: Remy Sylado

Case History:

Between periods as an 'entertainer', Tinung becomes the concubine of businessmen in the Chinese community in Java from about 1930 – 1960, as well as a *jugun ianfu* or comfort woman during the Japanese Occupation. She has no choice in the matter; her aunt handles her life, as well as all transactions with her 'clients'. Tinung is defined by her sexuality, and acts appropriately according to the role she must play, either as lustful partner (*ca-bau-kan*), or as submissive mistress (in the case of Tan Peng Liang, a tobacco and opium trader who becomes the most important man in her life). Significantly, Tinung remains silent and passive during the sexual act with Tan Peng Liang; active participation is evidently reserved for prostitutes.

Evidence:

She must be silent, and not respond. Meaning, that during the act, Indonesian women at that time considered that they were fulfilling the requirements of motherhood, or perhaps servitude, so that when they were in that position, they were allowing themselves to be like a rice field or a plot of land that remained silent when it was hoed and ploughed before the rice was planted.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Dia mesti diam, tidak melakukan respon. Artinya, untuk perbuatan itu, perempuan-perempuan Indonesia waktu itu menganggap diri memenuhi syarat keibuan, yang dapat berarti juga kababuan, apabila dalam kedudukan itu, dia biarkan dirinya menjadi seperti sawah atau ladang yang melulu diam jika dipacul atau dibajak sebelum ditanami padi.

During the Japanese invasion of Indonesia in 1942, Tinung is forced to become a 'comfort woman' for the Japanese army. In this most degrading phase of her life Tinung is stripped of her identity; her name disappears, and is replaced by a number. She becomes a *jugun ianfu*, a 'comfort woman' for countless Japanese soldiers who expect her to take an active role in the encounters.

When Tan Peng Liang's cousin arranges her release and takes her to a hospital in Bandung, she has lost all sense of self, has tried to commit suicide, and has contracted syphilis. She has been confined 'in an airless isolation cell, full of bedbugs, cockroaches and mice, together with other comfort women who had been thrown there like garbage'. (Sylado 1999: 289 - 290) ⁵⁸

In Bandung, Tinung slowly recovers her mental and physical health. She is under the constant delusion that she has committed unpardonable sins and that she is about to die. However, she survives what Marice in *The Weaverbirds* does not, probably because she has had a wider and more unconventional experience of the world and of sexuality. Her institutionalization is benign: a Dutch nurse reassures her that 'it's only a sin', and that God will forgive her.

Tinung could be seen as a frail, passive heroine at the mercy of powerful males in the form of aggressors / rescuers / protectors: her ship-owner husband, the managers on the riverboats, her patrons, and Tan Peng Liang (I) and (II), not to mention the Japanese Army. On the other hand, her ability to assume different identities: entertainer, prostitute, mistress, Chinese daughter-in-law, faithful de facto wife, assure her survival to the day she is reunited with Tan Peng Liang. It may be precisely her simplicity and ignorance that save her sanity.

SYMPTOMS: Simplicity / illiteracy. Defined by her sexuality. Ability to role-play. As Ca-bau-kan, controlled by her aunt, managers or patrons. Dependent personality. Comfort woman during the Japanese Occupation.

See *Roro Mendut* (1983: 295 – 296) for a similar 'rice fields' metaphor about women's sexual submissiveness.

⁵⁸ Akibatnya, tentara-tentara Jepang itu menendang dan menghempaskannya ke dalam sebuah ruang pengap isolasi, penuh kutubusuk, kecoak, dan tikus, bersama perempuan-perempuan *jugun ianfu* lain yang telah disampahkan di situ.

DIAGNOSIS: DETAINED AS COMFORT WOMAN FOR JAPANESE ARMY, INSTITUTIONALIZED IN ASYLUM / MADNESS / DEATH

OUTCOMES

'And so, the openness of the mother, the opening on to the mother, appear to be threats of contagion, contamination, engulfment in illness, madness and death.' (Luce Irigaray 1991: 40)

The ten women analysed in these case studies exhibit a variety of afflictions and outcomes. They come from diverse backgrounds, from privileged, middle-class families (Atik, Annelies, Marice, the mother in *Saman*) to simple, illiterate village girls (Tinung, Roro Mendut, Upi, Srintil) to small rural traders and urban 'professionals' (Ma Boejoeng, Men Negara). The historical settings of their stories range from the seventeenth century (*Roro Mendut*) to the late twentieth century (*Saman*).

Five are victims of sexual abuse: Tinung and Marice as comfort women during the Japanese occupation, Annelies as a victim of an incestuous rape, Srintil who is taken from prison to entertain the local army, and Upi, who is raped by hoodlums who are trying to remove the villagers of Sei Kumbang from their land. A further two characters, Ma Boejoeng and Men Negara, have been implicated in plots that lead to the murder or rape of other women. The remaining three, Roro Mendut, Saman's mother and Atik, could be said to be either the objects of the unrequited love of representatives of patriarchy, or of the Oedipal fixations of their sons.

SILENCE

Several of the characters are silenced, either by being 'spoken for' by the author / narrator / a male character, or by being robbed of identity. Yet another (Ma Boejoeng) has had her story rewritten by sending her mad at the end. Others (Marice, Upi, the Mother in *Saman*) speak an alternative, unintelligible or hysteric / aphasic language that excludes the rational male world, thus reinforcing their claim to the "feminine" domain of incoherence and madness. Annelies keeps silent for

many years about the incestuous rape by her brother, as does Saman's mother about her spirit family.

The most overt example of silencing is that of Srintil, whose narrative is carefully censored by the author. He declines to describe her years as a political prisoner, saying that Srintil would prefer to remain silent, no one else wants to talk about it, and anyway, her illiteracy would prevent her producing a written record. Similarly, Tinung adopts an attitude of passivity and silence during the sexual act, likening herself to a rice field waiting to be hoed and planted. As Barbara Johnson (1998: 137) argues: 'There seem, then, to be two things women are silent about: their pleasure and their violation. The work performed by the idealization of this silence is that *it helps culture not to be able to tell the difference between the two.*'⁵⁹ Furthermore, she argues that 'control over the undecidability between female pleasure and female violation has always already been at the heart of the literary canon.' (idem: 152)

Tinung, during her four months as a Japanese whore, loses her identity as well as her self-respect. 'She no longer had a name. Her name had disappeared. Now she was given only a number. Number 33' (Sylado 1999: 288). Upi is at first described as notorious but 'nameless', answering only to a generic name, as a dog does. The personal identities of Atik, Srintil, and Roro Mendut become subsumed by political metaphors: Atik as a maternal metaphor for the nation (Ibu Pertiwi), Srintil as representative of the backward, ignorant state of her village, and Mendut as a symbol of the traders from the north coast of Java who oppose the centralized authority of Mataram.

MADNESS

The madness that afflicts seven women in varying degrees is in two cases (the earliest two texts) an outcome of their own deliberate actions (Ma Boejoeng and Men Negara, both of whom become totally deranged). In the case of Marice and Tinung madness results from the sexual atrocities suffered during the Japanese occupation. As for Saman's mother and Upi, their unconventional mental states are respectively innate or congenital. Srintil's madness, ironically, is as a result of her failed aspirations to

⁵⁹ Johnson's italics. Johnson's 1998 essay "Muteness Envy" is a brilliant exposition of women's sexuality and the aesthetics of silence, as it relates to literature and other cultural forms.

exchange her traditional *ronggeng* status for that of wife and mother (the conventional image of *kodrat*).

Marice (like Annelies) becomes thin, pale and susceptible to illness. Several characters lose interest in hygiene and personal appearance; Ma Boejoeng forgets to put on clothes and eats her own excrement; Srintil sits in it. Men Negara wears torn and filthy clothes; her hair is matted, her eyes wandering. Five characters are incarcerated or institutionalized, in prisons, a cage, asylums or a hospital. Srintil, in fact, is incarcerated twice: as a political prisoner for two years and finally in a mental asylum. Roro Mendut, although not mad, is confined to the *kraton* of Wiroguno: it is her attempts to escape her imprisonment that produces much of the tension of the novel.

Two women avoid incarceration or institutionalization: the Mother in *Saman*, who is nurtured by an understanding husband, and Men Negara, who, unable to reconcile herself to the loss of her *warung*, the centre of her materialistic ambitions, is left to crawl about in the open, a representation remarkably similar to Charlotte Brontë's Bertha Mason (see the introduction to this chapter).

DEATH

Of the ten characters, eight die during the course of the narratives, three violently (Roro Mendut by *keris*, Upi by fire, and Atik in a plane crash). A further five, it is implied, die indirectly or directly as a result of their mistreatment and/or psychic tribulations, or in two cases (Tinung and Annelies) as a result of excessive dependency and attachment to one man. The deaths of Roro Mendut, Annelies and Atik create spaces for the narcissistic victories of the patriarchy, as does the incarceration (a living death) of Srintil.

Importantly, the theme of ambivalence towards the mother is a feature of at least three of the literary works discussed above: Teto, Wisanggeni and Rasus all express both obsessive attachment and irrational anger towards their maternal figures. Rasus stages a symbolic execution (by shooting an effigy) of the colonial official who possibly abducted his mother. Only then is his Oedipal anxiety laid to rest.

The Belgian philosopher Luce Irigaray (1991: 35) in a lecture given at a Mental Health conference on 'Women and Madness' (1981) acknowledged clearly the unfathomable power of the Mother, as well as the taboos pertaining to her. 'The relationship with

the mother is a mad desire, because it is the “dark continent” *par excellence*. It remains in the shadows of our culture; it is its night and its hell.’ But she also counsels about the dangers of cultural matricide and the need for women to reclaim maternal privilege; replacing silence, madness and death with renaissance, passion and speech.

(W) e must not once more kill the mother who was sacrificed to the origins of our culture. We must give her new life, new life to that mother, to our mother within us and between us. We must refuse to let her desire be annihilated by the law of the father. We must give her the right to pleasure, to *jouissance*, to passion, restore her right to speech, and sometimes to cries and anger. (Irigaray 1991: 43)

* * * *

In my selection of the case histories presented above I do not claim to be comprehensive; there are many additional characters that could have been subjects for ‘analysis’. Nor are all characters drawn from the ‘canon’ of Indonesian literature. However, it is to be hoped that my explorations in the light of the above essay and case studies will provide a starting point for future feminist investigations into the female psyche in Indonesian society, as mirrored in its literature.

CONCLUSION

'Now, what peculiarly signalizes the situation of woman is that she—a free and autonomous being like all human creatures—nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other... How can a human being in woman's situation attain fulfillment? What roads are open to her? Which are blocked? How can independence be recovered in a state of dependency? What circumstances limit woman's liberty and how can they be overcome? These are the fundamental questions on which I would fain throw some light.' (Simone de Beauvoir 1997 (1949): 29)¹

In this thesis I have linked two concepts, those of *kodrat wanita* (woman's intrinsic nature) and marginality. I have suggested that *kodrat* is a loosely defined term, a strategy to define and limit the agency and influence of women by assigning them to a subordinate position in the private and domestic sphere.

The most draconian and repressive application of *kodrat* occurred during Indonesia's New Order, in conjunction with the Five Duties of Women (Panca Dharma Wanita) administered through the Civil Wives Association (Dharma Wanita). In the case of New Order Indonesia, the curtailment of women's freedom can be seen as a backlash against the radical agenda of Gerwani (Wieringa 1998), later constructed by the New Order as politically subversive and sexually perverse. The 'model of militant motherhood' was replaced with Dharma Wanita, an ideal of submissive and apolitical service to husband, family and nation. As Ong and Peletz (1995b: 12) suggest, 'the ideological control of women's bodies and behavior is a recurring theme in attempts to retrieve a paternal essence in nationalist narratives'.

In this conclusion, I review the historical background, together with some general remarks about the possibility of agency for women on the margins in Indonesia as represented in works of literature. I also relate this to the current reality of marginal women in contemporary Indonesia.

As discussed in the introduction, women in the Indonesian archipelago experienced greater sexual freedom in the early modern period, and temporary unions with foreigners, even for élite women, were an accepted way of linking hospitality and

¹ *The Second Sex* was originally published as *Le Deuxieme Sexe* in 1949 (Editions Gallimard). The first English language edition was published in 1953. The citation above is from the "Introduction" to *The Second Sex*, Vintage, London, 1997; it uses the 1953 translation by H. M. Parshley.

commercial interests. However, as Andaya (1998) emphasizes, by the early seventeenth century, sexual transactions became depersonalised and the image of women who participated in these transactions became problematic. Associated with this were the cultural and religious mores associated with the introduction of world religions such as Islam, Hinduism and, eventually, Dutch Calvinism, leading to greater restrictions on women in sexual behaviour and dress, as well as access to public spaces such as markets and mosques.

Polygamy in the courts of the archipelago was an acceptable mode of patronage and presented an opportunity for proletarian women to improve their positions and the material wealth of their families. By enhancing the prestige of aristocratic males and legitimising relationships with other kingdoms, women were central (rather than marginal) and no stigma was attached to their position within the gender hierarchy of the courts. Even for a *selir* of proletarian or foreign origins there was the possibility of advancement to the position of *wanita perdana* (first lady) to which the presence of an aristocratic rival was no obstacle. In Mangunwijaya's novel *Roro Mendut*, the anxiety of Wiroguno's principal wife Nyai Ajeng that Roro Mendut might displace her is evidence of this.

By the twentieth century (as depicted in Pramoedya's novel *Gadis Pantai*), this situation seems to have changed, at least for the minor nobility, to one of serial monogamy, with *selir* being sent back to their villages once they had borne a child, or when their aristocratic partners married a woman of suitable caste and status. Eventually the *selir* acquired negative connotations, being conflated with prostitution and compared with the housekeeper-concubines of Dutch civil servants and planters. (Tirto 1998: 112)

From the seventeenth century, the institutions of concubinage and prostitution were developed to accommodate the sexual needs of unattached men in the cities, military barracks and plantations. Described as 'necessary evils', concubinage and prostitution addressed the restrictions on female immigration from Holland and the marriage bans for employees in the civil service, army and on the plantations. For the indigenous women who participated in these arrangements (usually without their consent) there were various outcomes; in the case of both Dutch and indigenous men, *nyai* were usually discarded when their *tuans* had the opportunity to make a more suitable marriage. However, some *nyai* improved their positions as a result of concubinage, for example Kartinah in *Coolie* and Nyai Ontosoroh in Pramoedya's

quartet of novels beginning with *Bumi Manusia*. By comparison the outcome for Gadis Pantai, the *selir* of a minor aristocrat in Rembang, is negative – she is evicted without the skills or the capital to do more than become an itinerant peddler.

The *nyais* depicted in the novels of Szekeley and Lulofs have almost no agency, being far from home and under the control of foreign planters or overseers. The realism of these literary works is confirmed by comparison of the novels of Szekeley and Lulofs with those of Pramoedya, as well as with other types of historical and sociological documents (Clerkx & Wertheim 1991). However, *nyais* in urban centres (such as Sitti Ningrum in Tirta's story "Busono") apparently were more sophisticated, better educated and had more choices than those in plantation culture, although they were nevertheless excluded from the social validation of marriage. As Taylor (1996: 233 – 234) points out, the *nyai* disappeared from "official" Indonesian literature in the first decades of the twentieth century, reappearing in the 1980s with the publication of Pramoedya's quartet of novels. 'She appears not at all in the novels of the Balai Pustaka writers for whom the *nyai* is shameful, too shameful even to be manipulated in the interests of an anti-colonial story' (idem). It could be argued that the traditions of both the temporary wife of the early modern era and the *nyai* of the colonial period continue in the institution of "contract wives", Asian women cohabiting with foreign men who live for extended periods of time in Indonesia (Murray 1991; Tsing 2006).

Prostitution as a commercial transaction was a new phenomenon in the Indies, beginning in Jakarta in the early seventeenth century. While Dutch and later, Indonesian authorities made efforts to control prostitution by various strategies, the most important of which has been the establishment of *lokalisasi* or brothel *kampungs*, it has never completely gone underground. Alison Murray (1991: 125) argues that:

Prostitutes are treated as commodities and belittled as immoral or pathological deviants, but from my experience with these women they are actually making a rational choice in response to the economic prospects of the city, and in selling their bodies as commodities are exploiting the capitalist system for their own purposes... Given lower-class women's economic prospects in Jakarta and the lack of egalitarian-based women's organizations, prostitution offers an alternative to moralistic patriarchal ideology, sexual repression, and exploitative factory employment.

Likewise Wolffers (1999) and Surtees (2005) argue for a more nuanced and less patronising view of prostitutes and their identities. Surtees in particular draws attention to the choice of prostitution by young women (*pecun*) with 'a menu of viable economic options' (Surtees 2005: 10) thus deconstructing the stereotype of women as victims of the system, inevitably constrained by poverty. The general stereotype of prostitutes as victims of capitalism is prominent in Mas Marco Kartodikromo's stories of Semarang and Surabaya published in the 1920s, although the female protagonists are also portrayed as predatory vampires searching for victims. The identities of the protagonists in other texts analyzed in the chapter on prostitution are the most problematic, ranging from the crab barber's captive girl whose status seems to be that of bonded slave (Poyk: 1968), to the high status, autonomy and prosperity enjoyed by Diva (Lestari 2001) and Dewi Ayu (Kurniawan 2004). It has been suggested (Wolffers et al 1999: 45) that 'there are moments in each sex worker's career when the demands of different identities cannot easily be reconciled... The shame of being discovered is often the result of incompatibility between the identity of daughter or village girl, and that of sex worker.' In addition, Wolffers et al. (1999: 40) argue that 'Research on prostitution is often only acceptable if it assumes that prostitution is a problem.... This kind of approach often victimizes those working in prostitution and/or stigmatizes them.' This is also true of the moralizing and proselytising attitude in some literary works about prostitution.

Although Surtees (2004) proposes that there is considerable agency for *pecun*, mirrored by Lestari's Diva, the current situation for ordinary prostitutes with little or no education suggests a different reality. The closing down of Jakarta's largest prostitution complex Kramat-Tunggak in December 1999 left 1,600 sex workers without any source of income. In the case of those women from Indramayu, one of the largest sources of sex workers, they were banned from continuing their trade in their home town. According to an Indonesian psychiatrist, 'What the government has done ... is merely "marginalize" and "displace" the sex workers'. (Yamin 1999)

Tohari's trilogy *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* was published during a time of increasing ambivalence towards a performing art that has sacral origins and a history of connection with the courts at least back to the fourteenth century. Again, it was the sexual elements of the performance that attracted most criticism. Although in the case of prostitution and *ronggeng* / *taledhek*, some Indonesian writers have suggested historical precedents in the form of *hetaerae* (Ashadi Siregar: Foreword to Krisna 1979; Tohari 2001), the backlash against perceived immorality in certain areas

of Indonesia since the introduction of regional autonomy is apparently more influential.

According to Boellstorff (2003: 32), 'unlike *waria* [male-to-female transvestites], *gay* and *lesbi* are not concepts with significant historical depth; they appear to have first arisen in the 1970s.' Ironically, Indonesia's first lesbian organization, *Perlesin*, had its own chapter of Dharma Wanita, thus mimicking and parodying mainstream gender dichotomies (Jeumpa & Ulil 2001: 13). According to Blackwood (1999: 185) the gender categories of *cowok* / *cewek* (with associated dress codes) differ from butch / femme identities in the West: 'Whereas butches consider themselves women... tombois see themselves as men.' Urban Indonesian lesbians both draw inspiration from their international counterparts and endeavour to rediscover indigenous origins for a lesbian tradition (Gayatri 2005).

Calon Arang / Rangda's wayward and disruptive character has been reiterated by western writers from Covarrubias (1935) to Eisemann (1989), as well as tourist-oriented performances in Bali, until she has become almost a caricature, a fearsome and demented madwoman with a high-pitched laugh, a convenient metaphor for wickedness in novels such as A. A. Panji Tisna's *Sukreni Gadis Bali*; the evil partner in various complementary scenarios: Barong / Rangda; depraved witch / innocent *legong* dancer (Vickers 1989). As early as 1949, however, the ethnologist Jane Belo described the various interpretations attached to Rangda, underscoring a multiplicity of identities depending on the perspective of the interpreter:

Who is Rangda? ...We are not the first to ask this question. The answers proposed by the various authorities who have studied the problem are turned according to the special interests of their individual disciplines. Thus, to the archeologist and student of Eastern religion, Rangda is Durga, the wife of Siva in her dread aspect. To the historian, she is Queen Mahendradatta, a true character out of Indonesian history, mother of King Erlangga, the Balinese prince who became king in Java in 1019 A.D. To the student of theatre, she is the angry widow (literally, *rangda* means widow), a stock character in a series of plays current in the human and puppet theatre in Bali, the chief character of the classic *Tjalonarang* play. To the contemporary ethnologist,² she is a mother figure, an expression of the parent child relations peculiar to the culture and of the character of the adult as determined by those early relations. To the psychologist, she is Fear. (Belo 1949: 18)

² Jane Belo was referring to Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead's book *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis*, New York Academy of Sciences, New York, 1942.

These diverse images of Calon Arang perhaps illustrate the elusive identities of all women on the margins, their ability to move from prostitute to temporary wife, from *nyai* to shopkeeper, from tea-seller to brothel owner, from *cewek* to *cowok*, from courtesan to Japanese comfort woman to respectable wife. Some of the protagonists do not survive the more difficult transitions; especially when they have no choice. Even the terminology is ambiguous, as difficult to pin down as the term *kodrat*. As I have mentioned, the term *selir* has no acceptable English equivalent, *nyai* apparently could also be used for a respectable upper-class woman or the wife of a *kiyai*, while *ca-bau-kan* has several interpretations, from the generic one of 'woman' to the companion of a Chinese man, to a riverboat entertainer.

The importance of clothing as a marker of identity in the literary texts I have analyzed is also significant: This is especially so in the earlier texts. Nyai Dasima's finery is exchanged for an old black sarong belonging to the senior wife of Samiun, symbolizing her inferior status as *madu* (co-wife). In the stories of Soerjo and Kartodikromo, the clothing of the prostitute Atimah and the *nyais* Ratna and Sitti Ningrum is described in minute detail. Likewise, Tinung's new prosperity on her return to her village is signified by her expensive clothing and jewellery. The dress codes of Mama Kalong and Dewi Ayu in *Cantik itu Luka* also indicate their superior status and position in Halimunda, and imply that "respectable" women do not have a monopoly on propriety and good taste. That dress is a major marker of women's status or ambitions is also clearly expressed in the radical changes in Srintil's costume to a simple, modest style after she returns from prison to her village, reflecting her aspirations to become a housewife.

I now return to the question of agency. Ironically, the female characters with most power are apparently those who have connections with foreigners. The women who receive a Western education or acquire it from their male partners are better equipped to re-invent their lives: for example Nyai Ontosoroh and Dewi Ayu (who has both Dutch blood-lines and a convent education). The others are displaced persons, on the fringes of society, with few independent options and little possibility for agency. Tohari (1995b) and Sylado (1999) explicitly express the limitations of illiteracy for Srintil and Tinung. In Srintil's case it is the rationalization for her not telling her own story; for Tinung it is seen as the source of her misfortunes.

How much agency is possible for women on the margins of *kodrat*? All categories of women discussed in this thesis are defined in some way by their sexuality and its relationship to mainstream heterosexual discourse. There are frequent overt or covert allusions in the texts that define the protagonists by their proximity to (or exclusion from) the institution of marriage. For example, Calon Arang / Mahendradatta is banished to the forest by her husband for practising witchcraft. Edward W. loves Nyai Dasima 'as though she were his legal wife'. Poppy (*Rubber*) 'felt herself a wife, and had long given up the idea that she could be displaced by another woman'. In *The Root of all Evil*, Tati is suspected of putting pressure on the boss to divorce his wife and marry her. The most favourable possibilities for female agency occur in scenarios of female solidarity and / or woman-centred texts and subtexts, for example in *Belenggu*, *Roro Mendut*, *Saman*, *Lines* and *Cantik itu Luka*. The women protagonists in the weakest position are those without peer support, remaining, however benignly, under patriarchal control.

It is clear that the institutions of the *keputren*, concubinage, *tayuban* and prostitution, existed (or still exist in different forms) to serve the sexual inclinations of a patriarchal regime with polygamous tendencies. It is also evident that female sexual power was (and is) viewed ambivalently by males, who have set up these institutions to control female sexuality and contain it within a dominant patriarchal framework. Ironically, the *lokalisasi* have provided a protected haven for prostitutes. The activities of street walkers or independent operators or even bar girls and hostesses can be fraught with danger, either from the clients or from their wives (Anggraeni 1987; Sunindyo 1996). The privileged position of Lestari's Diva may yet be a remote possibility. Although the position of lesbians on the more distant margins of mainstream sexual discourse removes the possibility of some forms of institutionalization, the pressures of family to conform to the conventional expectations of marriage together with insinuations of deviance (as described in Ratri M.'s *Lines* and Herlinatiens' *Garis Tepi Seorang Lesbian*) make disclosure or an alternative lifestyle problematic.

Much of the literature I have analyzed depends on a binary male/female scenario, with the female protagonists restricted to the local and/or domestic sphere. In addition, *Burung-burung Manyar*, *Roro Mendut* and *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* are dominated by a military / heroic presence. In all three cases the female protagonist is a trope for nation, village or the proletariat outside the central court. I have plucked the women protagonists from their binary relationships with their male counterparts,

focussing on their own tribulations and aspirations, in order to analyze how they are constrained in literary works by (mainly) male authors during the Dutch colonial era and New Order Indonesia.

The recent works of Ayu Utami, Dewi Lestari, Ratri M., Herlinatiens, and Djenar Maesa Ayu all embrace the possibilities of female agency and express them through woman-centred narratives. This is especially so in the novels of Ayu Utami, where the four main protagonists are women. The character of Shakuntala is bisexual, acting out her sexuality through dance, through the celebration of her body. The metaphor of the carnivorous flower in *Larung*, as a paradigm for female sexual agency, clearly deconstructs the mainstream myth of female passivity.

Indonesian literature over the last century has produced some powerful (if not always empowered) images of women. Some of the most memorable have been those of women on the margins, such as Nyai Dasima, Nyai Ontosoroh, Gadis Pantai, Roro Mendut, and Srintil the *ronggeng* dancer. I have linked their stories with those of indigenous women in Dutch Indies literature from the 1890s to 1950, expatriate writing from Australia, little-known stories of women from Indonesian writers outside the canon, and ground-breaking literature published in the seven years post-New Order (1998 – 2005).

The late twentieth and early twenty-first century has produced new and experimental literary forms, as well as a plethora of women writers who have transcended the social and literary conventions implied by *kodrat*. They have re-defined and broadened the understanding of women's sexuality, as well as validating stigmatized and marginal women such as prostitutes and lesbians. Although the mainstream concept of *kodrat* has not been overshadowed, its parameters are being challenged.

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